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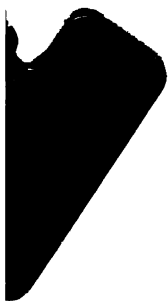
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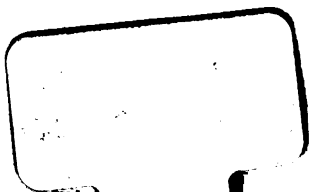


by

LEO DITRICHSTEIN



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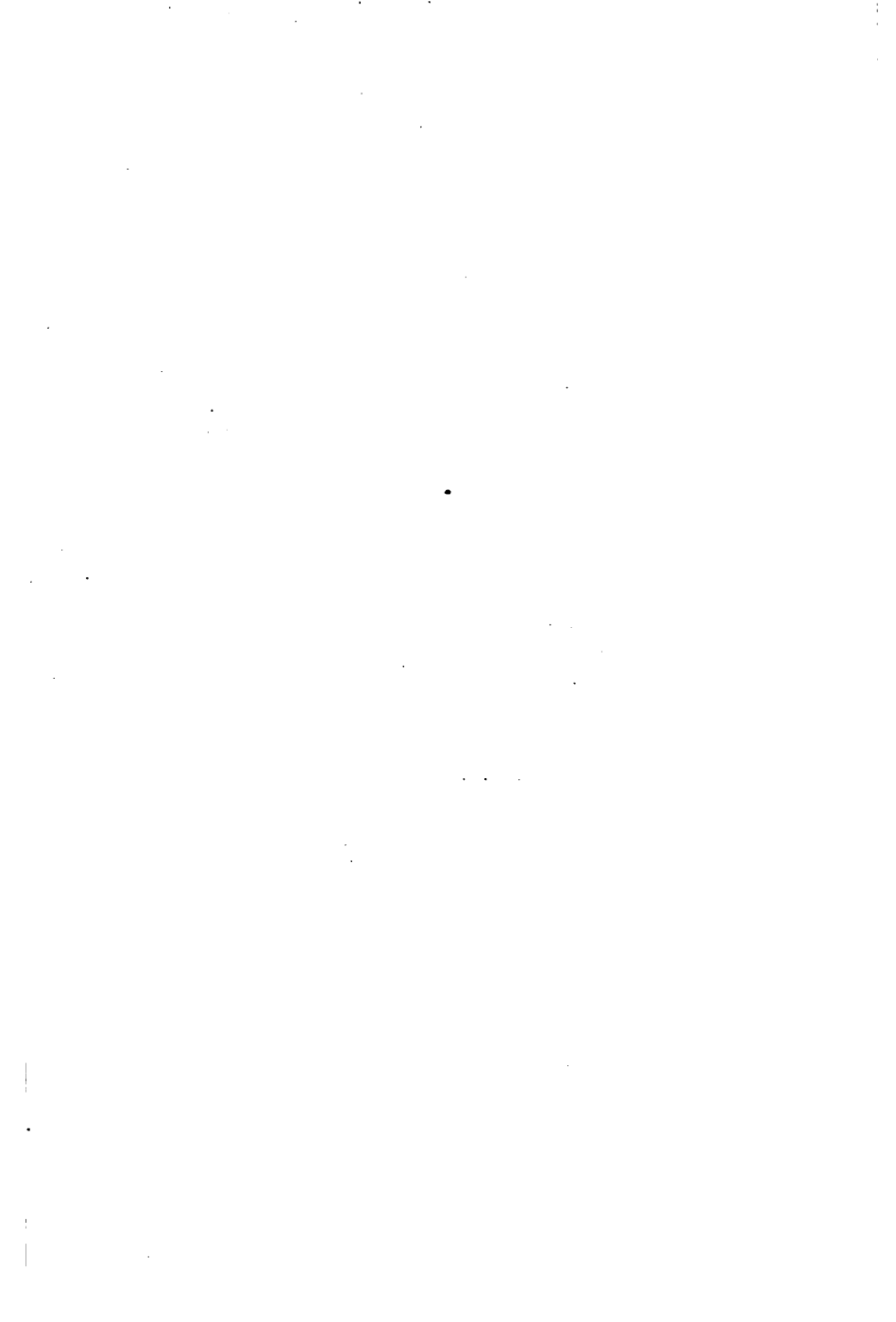


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"STAY, IF YOU LOVE YOUR LIVES !"—*Frontispiece.*



THE
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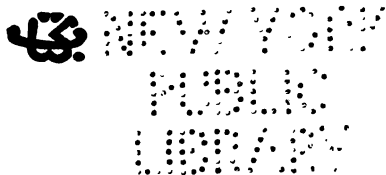
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A Romance of 1796.

BY
LEO DITRICHSTEIN

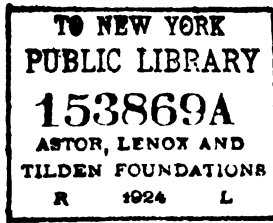
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The Song of the Sword.

NEW YORK
DURIN
1900

DEDICATED

TO MY DEAR FRIENDS

E. H. AND VIRGINIA SOTHERN.

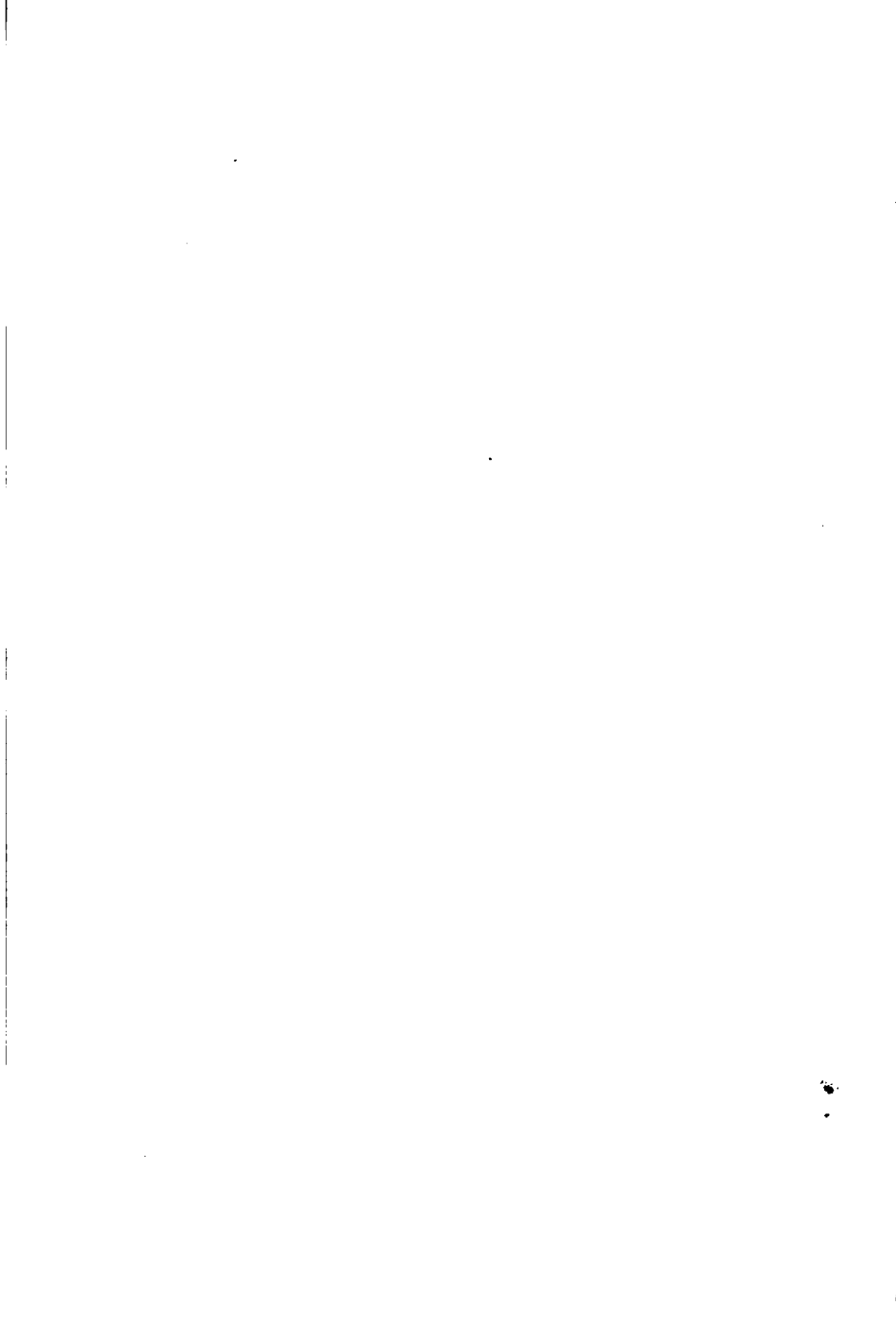
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THE SONG OF THE SWORD.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN OF DESTINY.

There is a little inn on the outskirts of Piacenza, which to this day is pointed out to the visiting stranger, as one of the sights of that ancient city.

The house is in no way remarkable, and does not differ from a great many others—still, the guide will take you there and point to a marble slab over the door.

Wind, weather, and the tooth of time, have played havoc with the inscription, which at one time undoubtedly explained why the rickety old shanty has not been torn down to this day.

On the 8th of May, in the year of our Lord 1796, four men were seated around a table in a room on the ground floor of this inn. A fifth, with his back turned to them, stared out into the night through the open window.

A lamp suspended from the ceiling, shed its meagre light upon the four men, and the table covered with charts.

The first man on the bench next the wall, bending over the charts, was tall, broad shouldered. His uniform of a General of Division, of the Republic "one and indivisible," though stained and showing wear and tear, fitted his herculean figure like a glove.

He looked up pensively.

His features were neither good nor bad, but a trifle coarse. The forehead was broad and low, and distinguished by a perpetual frown; an exceedingly heavy jaw spoke of bull dog pertinacity. He slowly turned his face toward the man at the window, who, as if the hitherto heated discussion had no interest for him, kept on staring into the night.

Turning back to the man opposite him, a tall, spare individual, whose ancestors, if his face did not lie, must have helped to build Solomon's temple in the Holy City, he remarked in a low strong voice, which was admirably in keeping with his huge physique: "I think it is impossible—I am opposed to it."

The other three nodded their heads in acquiescence.

"Erase that word from your dictionary, Augereau! It does not exist in mine!"

This came from the little man at the window.

At Augereau's words he had turned quickly, and with

his hand on his hip, stood now facing the four men at the table.

He was the thinnest and most remarkable human being imaginable.

According to the fashion of the time, he wore the so-called "oreilles de chien," two strains of hair hanging over the temples, covering the ears and touching the shoulders.

Two dark, forbidding, inscrutable eyes gleamed underneath a very high, pale brow.

His face could have been called beautiful, in its almost classical regularity, had it not been for its sickly pallor and some very obvious imperfections of his complexion.

The shabby uniform of a General of Infantry hung loosely on his emaciated body; clumsy, ill-fitting boots, a tricolor scarf, carelessly tied around his waist, completed the outfit of this grotesque personage.

But, when once over the first impression, by a glance into these eyes which seemed to read people's souls, one soon became aware of the fact that the man had an uncommonly strong individuality.

The well-shaped mouth and firmly modelled chin betrayed an iron will. The sharp, strident voice was characteristic of a man used to command.

Although he did not raise it above the tone of ordinary conversation, it suggested tremendous nervous force and power.

The men at the table, under its spell, rose and listened in respectful silence.

Coming close to the table, he put one of his long, thin, swarthy hands on the map before him, and continued:

"Shall we wait until we are taken between two fires? Colli with his 20,000 men is still at Alba awaiting his opportunity."

"Colli?" came from the lips of the four men almost simultaneously.

"And the armistice?" shouted the tall, aristocratic looking man who stood next to Augereau.

"Expires May 12th—to-day is the 8th—General Serruer. To-morrow may be theirs, to-day is ours! I propose to march upon Lodi before Beaulieu has time to fall behind the Adda."

"Then you think the armistice was only a ruse to gain time, Citizen General?" asked the fifth man, who up to this time had kept a religious silence.

"General Laharpe," kept on the little one, turning to the interrogator, "upon our next move depends the fate of this campaign. If we strike Beaulieu before the 12th the Court of Torino will be driven to bay, and will accept the terms of peace, as stipulated by me in the armistice: The surrender of Coni, Tortona and Alessandria—the line of demarkation along the banks of the Stura and Tanasti, to Asti—from there, over Nice to the Bormida, and along the banks to the Tarnaro and Po." He indicated the lines with his finger on the map before him.

For a few minutes there reigned silence in the room.

The four officers, bending over the charts, were evidently thinking over the matter just put before them. The little man walked back to the window and shiveringly closed it. This being done, with his eyes riveted upon the floor as if in deep thought, he slowly returned to the table.

"Now let us look at the reverse of the medal. If we wait until the armistice expires, Voltri, Montellegino, Montenotte, Millesimo, Dego, Seva, Cursaglia and Mondovi have been fought in vain. For the last three days despatches have been exchanged between Beaulieu and Colli—their object ——"

"Colli dare not move before the 12th," broke in the sonorous voice of the gallant General of Division, bringing his fist down with such force upon the table that it creaked in its hinges. "It is against all rules of civilized warfare!"

"My brave Augereau, in this war against us Sansculottes, everything is permissible. The King of Sardinia does not for one moment consider himself bound by the word and signature given to me. The end justifies the means. The Republic is to be crushed, annihilated at all costs. Mark my words, you'll probably have cause to remember them: The army of Italy has ceased to exist if Colli and Beaulieu are permitted to join forces!"

Raising his right hand threateningly, like an actor who has reached his climax, he looked searchingly into the faces of his subordinates to watch the effect of his words.

Their reluctance to indorse the daring plan of their leader was slowly giving way before the crushing logic of his arguments; their eyes began to flash, their hands involuntarily felt for their swords.

"Have you positive proof of Colli's treachery?" indignantly exclaimed the individual with the Jewish cast of features.

"Nothing in black on white, Massena. Their emissaries, familiar with the country, have so far evaded the vigilance of our spies, but before morning, Citizens, I shall give you all the proofs your hearts may desire. Quick decision at this moment means a speedy termination of the campaign, ease and comfort in Milan in less than a week from to-day."

He had talked himself warm—the flush of excitement brought out more prominently the little blemishes on his face.

The thought of what he had already accomplished, and even more the thought of victory which he saw in his grasp, gave his face a spiritual beauty, compared to which the martial, imposing appearance of Augereau, or Serruer's calm dignity, paled into insignificance. One forgot his spare, short figure, the shabby, ill-fitting uniform, and his ridiculous hairdress: he was a giant.

His was the enthusiasm of the poet, the artist, who revels in the beauty of his own work. He electrified and carried away his companions-in-arms.

"On to Milan!" they shouted in unison.

A faint smile flickered across the pale, sphinx-like face. He had gained his point.

Calm and business-like, sharp and concise, he began to give his orders for the following day. After he had finished, he shook hands with them, and they passed out to return to their various commands.

The last one to depart was General Laharpe. Almost on the threshold, the little man called him back, and shaking hands once more, and more warmly than he did with the others, he said:

"You'll have to bear the brunt to-morrow, you're liable to encounter Liptay's division before noon—bonne chance."

Was it premonition? Did something tell him he would not see him again?

General Laharpe fell at Fombio, less than twenty-four hours later, accidentally shot by his own men in the pellmell of battle.

The chill which had shortly before made him close the window, came over him again. Shaking with fever, he put a gray shabby surtout over his shoulders, sat down and wrote as follows:

8th Prairial, Year 4.

Citizen Directors:

"The King of Sardinia is bent upon treachery. I have given orders to march upon

Lodi, which I shall reach by to-morrow night, and force Beaulieu to fight then and there, before the expiration of the armistice. I shall take all of Lombardy, and before the month is over, I hope to cross the Alps—combine with the army of the Rhine, and we can then jointly carry the war into Bavaria.

Give orders to the commander of the army of the Alps to send me 15,000 men of his force—I shall then have 45,000 men, and there is a possibility of my dispatching part of them against Rome."

Sig: Napoleon Buonaparte.

Commander-in-chief of The Army of Italy.

CHAPTER II

ÉGALITÉ.

Having finished writing, the General carefully sealed the document and gave it to the young Captain of artillery who had entered at his call.

"By special messenger to the government in Paris."

The aide saluted and turned on his heels, but his usually taciturn chief was in a communicative mood. Dropping his official manner, he put his hand on the Captain's shoulder, and continued in a tone of easy camaraderie, which reminded the aide of the days when they both were pupils in the military school at Brienne.

"Well, Marmont, what do you think the people in Paris are saying about us?"

"They must be filled with admiration for you, Citizen General."

"Ah, they haven't seen anything yet," he replied, pleased with the young artilleryman's answer. "Fortune has not smiled on me long enough to make me despise her favours; she is a woman, and the more she does for me, the more I shall ask of her. In our time, no one so far has done anything great; I'll set the world an example."

The clatter of hoofs, breaking the stillness of the night, put an end to these confidences.

"See who it is, Marmont?"

The aide opened the door just in time to see an officer sharply drawing rein on his foaming steed.

"Where is General Augureau, comrade?" the newcomer inquired, while quickly alighting from his horse.

"Gone back to Castel Nuovo."

"Sapristi, too bad!—I rode as if the devil were behind me, thinking I'd catch him here."

"Anything of importance?" asked the General, who, standing in the shadow, had so far allowed his aide to carry on the conversation.

"Rather—could either of you lend me a horse, comrades? I don't think I'd ever get to Castel Nuovo on mine—he is pretty well used up."

"Tie him to a tree, and come in for a moment; we'll see what we can do for you."

"Impossible, comrade; the General is waiting for me—the moments are too precious to be wasted in talk." He chuckled to himself while he loosened the horse's girth. "We have quite a surprise in store for the Little Corporal."

"Oh," came from the man in the shadow. "Can't you let us into your secret? We'd enjoy a joke at the Little Corporal's expense, as much as General Augureau."

"Sorry, comrade, but orders are strict. What about my horse? I must push on.—Ventre St. Gris!

"Mort de ma vie! Cut short, and do as I bid you!" curtly and impatiently broke in General Buonaparte, stepping within the radius of the dim lamp-light, so that the man without could see the General's epaulettes on his shoulders.

"At your orders, Citizen General," replied the newcomer, unabashed by the discovery that he had been talking to the commander-in-chief. Then raising his voice, addressing no one in particular, he continued:

"Is there no one around here who could walk my horse about, before he gets windbroken? He is steaming hot—I should not like to lose him," he added, patting the tired beast's wet neck.

The General gave a short, nervous laugh, as was habitual with him when half angered and half amused, and whispered to the aide: "What a sentimental fellow! Take his horse, or we'll never find out what Augereau is up to."

The aide, who had enjoyed the little controversy between the General and the stranger, stepped outside and took hold of the reins. "I'll walk him about."

"Thank you, comrade. Coquin has served me faithfully during three campaigns, and I'm anxious to do the right thing by him."

Giving the horse a last hearty love-tap on his mighty quarters, he briskly walked to the door. On the threshold he stopped, saluted, then holding his hands close to the seams of his breeches, the heels tight together, head erect, he waited to be addressed.

The General had stepped back into the shadow and curiously eyed the man whose frank and easy way in his presence were evidently a new experience to him.

"Step forward!—Halt!" he commanded, as soon as the stranger was in a position where the full light of the lamp struck his face. The unflinching way in which the young officer looked into his eyes displeased him; the General's eyes began to wander from the handsome, well-cut face, down the slender figure dressed in the uniform of a Captain of the 7th regiment of Hussars, to the neat, well-made boots. Nothing escaped his observation.

He noticed the care with which the two braids in front were plaited and powdered—the coquettish upper twirl of the little black mustache—the large blue eyes which spoke of tenderness and thought—the eagle beak—the strong chin—the heavy brows, which came close together at the root of the nose, and the fine fit of the picturesque dust-covered uniform.

"A ci-devant," he muttered to himself.

Addressing the Captain, he asked curtly for his name.

"Egalité, Citizen General."

"Egalité? This is not your real name?"

"No, Citizen General."

"What is, or was, your real name?"

"Marie Aime Honoré, Marquis de la Tour d'Auvergne."

"What made you change it—fear of the guillotine?"

The last words he drawled out slowly and with a tinge of sarcasm.

"No, Citizen General, respect for the laws of my country, which abolished all titles."

Nothing in his even tone or voice told whether he felt the sting in the General's words.

"H'm," the Corsican grumbled, turning away.

The calm unruffled manner in which the young officer answered the question, exasperated and displeased him. He began to pace the floor, and for the next few minutes seemed to have forgotten the Captain's presence.

The contrast in manner and carriage of the two men was most marked. The tall, slender Captain with his ease and grace, was the typical grand seigneur of the *ancien régime*, while the little man who walked up and down the room automaton-like, with his hands on his back, looked more like an Italian bandit than a French General.

There is something in breeding, and the Corsican felt it. He resented it inwardly: it put his nerves on edge. His pacing up and down the room, while the other had to stand attention, was the outward expression of his resentment. Suddenly, however, he seemed to remember the reason for calling in the young officer. Abruptly stopping in front of him, he once more focussed his eyes on Egalité's in a vain attempt to make him lower his.

"Where do you come from, Captain?"

"From Lodi, Citizen General."

"Peste! What were you doing there?" He could hardly mask his surprise. His eyes began to blaze; they hung on the Captain's lips.

"On a foraging expedition, Citizen General."

"And what is the secret you were so anxious to impart to General Augereau? Answer quickly!"

"General Beaulieu has begun to cross the Adda."

"Mort de ma vie!" thundered the general. "Marmont—Marmont!"

The quiet, impassive man had changed into a demon at the Captain's news. Tearing open the window, he called out: "Where is everybody?" The members of his staff, rubbing the sleep out of their eyes, began to rush in.

"Give the alarm! You, Captain, ride on as fast as your horse will carry you, inform General Augereau—you Elliott, to Massena—you to Laharpe. Beaulieu is crossing the Adda! My horse!"

With the last words he rushed from the room, followed by his retinue.

Egalité was bewildered by the turmoil. The horn-signals which began to arouse the camp at Piacenza brought him back to reality. Shaking off the stupor into which the young General's frantic activity had for the moment thrown him, he slowly made his way into the open. There he caught a last glimpse of his chief as he madly dashed along the moonlit road.

"So, this is the man of the 13th Vendemaire," he mused. "If first impressions go for anything with him—I'm afraid I have not made a very favorable one."

He had for the first time been face to face with the young Corsican, whose fame had already begun to throw the directors in Paris into convulsions of jealousy and fear.

Having a somewhat philosophical turn of mind, as is becoming to a student of "Maitre Jean Jacques," he tried to get order into the whirligig of thoughts which, will-o'-the-wisp like, pirouetted in his head.

All attempts at classifying his impressions were in vain. The events of the last five minutes seemed a dream—a vision.

At last he succeeded in bringing the man's personality before his mind's eye, as he had stood before him, calmly, impassively interrogating him. Then came the transformation which his news about Beaulieu had brought about as if by magic.

Again all thoughts and logical reasoning came to a stop. He could not come to any conclusion about the man who had seemed cold-blooded and grotesque one moment, and became a veritable volcano the next.

All this puzzled, fascinated him, and without being aware of it, he said aloud: "What a remarkable man."

The abnormal in the young Corsican's make-up, which supplied ample food for Egalité's reflections, caused a much older man than he—General Beaulieu—

sleepless nights. Leaf by leaf the young adventurer had plucked from the laurel wreath which fifty years of faithful service to his Emperor had placed on Beau-lieu's white head.

After six weeks of continuous warfare, after seven pitched battles, the Austrian General was as much at sea about him as the young Captain who had just seen him for the first time.

Coquin, hearing the familiar signals, began to stamp the ground. This interrupted Egalité's reverie, and reminded him of his duty. Mechanically he untied the horse, which, like a good old cavalry nag, pricked its ears and turned around to give his master a chance to mount. A slight touch with the spurs, and Coquin set off in a short canter. But soon he felt his master's grip was relaxing, and tired as he was he began to loaf.

Egalité, wrapped up in his thoughts, forgot to reprimand him for it. The horse instinctively felt there was something wrong with the man on its back, it threw up its head as if it wished to say: "What's the trouble?"

Egalité paid no attention to Coquin's antics; he was still under the spell of the marvelous personality he had just encountered.

Some sort of presentiment that their paths had not crossed for the last time took hold of him, and no matter how hard he tried to reason with himself, he could not shake it off.

"Pshaw, he and I—what nonsense! What have we in common? By this time he has forgotten me."

Like old General Beaulieu's, Egalité's estimate of the man was wrong. Buonaparte never forgot a face he once looked into, as he had looked into his. Beware! Coquin stumbled.

Taking a good grip on the reins and giving his horse a dose of the iron for his carelessness, Captain Egalité galloped down the hill on the road to Castel Nuovo.

CHAPTER III.

FRANCESCA.

Castle St. Angelo, boldly perched on top of a hill, lies about half a mile south of Castel Nuovo.

Built toward the end of the fifteenth century by Matteo St. Angelo, it must at that time have been well-nigh impregnable. Often besieged, there is no record of its ever having surrendered.

George von Frundsberg, the great chieftain of the mercenaries of the fifth Charles, can tell a tale about it.

Count Matteo, who desired to remain neutral in the strife between the Spanish Charles and Francis, "the last knight," as he is now called, answering the query of Joerg von Waldburg, Frundsberg's lieutenant and spokesman, as to whose friend he was, made the characteristic reply: "God's friend—everybody's foe." For two weeks or more, Frundsberg brought his entire machinery of war into play to reduce the formidable bastions.

Big stone balls from his catapults, imbedded in the rampart on the south side of the castle, testify to the fine practise of his artillery. Matteo, watching from the big tower, snapped his finger at them and laughed. At

last Frundsberg gave up the siege as hopeless and pursued his way.

"In tempestate securitas," is the motto on the crest engraved in the stone over the big portal. "Safety in storm," alas! it reads like irony in the face of the present facts; and the two caryatids holding the crest over the portal of the new wing, built at the beginning of the eighteenth century, by Flavio St. Angelo, the grandfather of Alberto, seem to grin as they listen to the sounds coming through the open window of the hall on the ground floor:

"Allons! enfants de la Patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé."

It rang through the night like a peal of thunder, this mighty Song of the Sword—the nation-inspiring *Marseillaise*, the most potent hymn of history—and penetrated the halls, the gorgeous rooms, and almost shook the oaken door of the chapel in which the earthly remains of the St. Angelos slept the eternal sleep of peace.

None of them rose and burst the ribs of his sepulchre, to drive out the invaders, who, after having yelled themselves hoarse, quenched their thirst in bumpers of fiery *Marsala* and *Lacrima Christi*, which Count Alberto, the last lord of the manor, used to serve on extraordinary occasions.

This occasion, verily, was extraordinary enough.

Something of the sort must have been the thought of

a young girl, dressed in the garb of a peasant of upper Italy, as she briskly walked through the dark alleys of the park. Tears of shame and mortification were streaming down her cheeks; her little hands clinched, as she thought of the insult offered to her, a St. Angelo, by one of the invaders of her country. Her aunt Pamela, sister of her father, an old spinster, had left at the first news of the approach of the Sans-culottes, and the panic stricken servants, one and all, except Crispina, her nurse, had followed. The kind-hearted old woman had entreated her to leave with her, but Francesca had haughtily resented the idea of a St. Angelo—on her mother's side, a Boccanera—who had given several popes to the Church of Rome—running away from this "crapule." But reluctantly giving in to her nurse Crispina, she had donned the peasant's garb for greater safety.

Like a herd of wolves they had taken possession. At her remonstrance against their uncereemonious demeanor, one of the Sans-culottes, a big burly fellow with a black mustache, had had the audacity to chuck her under the chin.

Oh! that she were a man! She could have killed him without one sting of remorse.

Francesca had reached the gate of the park. Suddenly remembering something, she stopped. A thought had occurred to her.

"Cesare—what was he going to do? He must be warned!"

He was the son of Battista St. Angelo, an Austrian gentlewoman, and heir in succession to the St. Angelo estate, since Count Alberto, the last male descendant of the main branch of the family had died, leaving only a daughter—Francesca.

Both of Cesare's parents died when he was an infant, and Alberto, then childless himself, true to the promise he had given to Battista before his death, took the boy into his house, and brought him up as his own.

A few years after, his wife gave birth to a girl. This was somewhat of a shock to him. He had prayed for a son and heir. Still, he and his wife were both young, and there was hope as long as there was life.

The "Princess," as all the servants called her—she was a Boccanera, a very pious woman—seeing her husband's heart was set upon having a St. Angelo of his own flesh and blood to succeed him, undertook a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Madonna di San Loretto, never to return alive.

She contracted pneumonia which took her off within a few days. Her husband was grief-stricken and conscience-stricken as well, when the news reached him. Was he not the indirect cause of the untimely end of his beautiful wife? His constantly expressed desire for a son—the disappointment plainly visible in his face when the doctors informed him of the birth of his daughter, had driven her to make the pilgrimage.

A broken man, he went to San Loretto to bring home

her earthly remains. He buried her with all the pomp and ceremony due to her station, in the chapel at the east end of the castle, and the obsequies being over, went into a long period of mourning.

For years he shut himself up in his apartments, indifferent to everything going on in his four walls, even more indifferent to the events of the outside world. The existence of his daughter he had quite forgotten.

Meanwhile Francesca and the boy, left to the care of Crispina, grew up.

The girl, as she advanced in years, looked more and more like her mother. She had that beautiful reddish-brown hair which distinguished the Boccaneras—the finely chiselled face—the aquiline nose and slightly voluptuous mouth which made Francesca Boccanera famous as the most beautiful girl in Rome. Her skin, like all women's with a Titian head, was as white as alabaster; add small, well-shapen hands and feet, and you have the image of the pictures which grace the walls of the Boccanera Palace in Rome. But, if in her looks she was a Boccanera, in her character she certainly was a full-fledged St. Angelo. High-spirited, proud, haughty, self-willed and courageous to a degree, she was a worthy scion of the Count Matteo, who in his stronghold defied the mercenaries of the fifth Charles.

The boy Cesare was the son of his Austrian mother. Good-looking in an effeminate sort of way, he was an indolent, lazy, good-for-nothing boy without back bone.

Though more than five years her senior, he was entirely dominated by the strong-minded, willful girl.

Left to themselves most of the time, they explored the castle, the hills and country in the vicinity; played Prince Charming and Enchanted Princess, only the roles were reversed—the Princess mostly delivered the Prince. They killed many dragons and other beasts of fable, and led a life altogether untrammelled by such conventionalities as make other children's lives a burden—the study of the alphabet or the rudiments of arithmetic. Francesca was nearly seven, the boy quite twelve years old, and neither could read nor write.

A few miles to the south, on a hill, stood the ruins of a feudal stronghold, to them an object of great curiosity. They asked Crispina about it, but the old peasant woman, fearing they might some day stray away too far on their rambles, told them a terrible tale of a sorcerer, who enticed children into his net to transform them into pigs, geese and other animals, which he devoured after they had been fattened to his liking. Hundreds of children had already fallen victims of his cunning, so the story went.

If it was Crispina's intention to frighten them, she made her reckoning without her host, that is—Francesca. For days and nights, awake and in her dreams, the girl saw the hapless little ones in the pigsty and in the hen-coop, crying out their poor eyes. At last she made up her mind to deliver them.

On night, while being put to bed by Crispina, she induced her to tell her the tale of the sorcerer all over again, and slyly asked Crispina how the poor children could be delivered. The nurse, not suspecting the mischief her story was to bring about, told her the Lord's prayer spoken in front of the ruins before the first cock-crow, would not only break the spell, but would also send the sorcerer back to Hades whence he had come.

Francesca reflected for a few minutes. The Lord's prayer she knew, Crispina had taught it to her; and for the rest, she trusted to herself. After saying her little prayer for her mother in heaven and her father on earth, her curly head fell on the pillow, and Crispina, thinking her asleep, sought her own humble couch in the room adjoining. Soon after, her regular breathing and an occasional snore, told the wide-awake child that the peasant was sleeping the sleep of the just. She quietly got out of her bed, and with as little noise as possible put on her clothes.

Through Crispina's room she cautiously crept into Cesare's, who was fast asleep with his mouth open. She called him—no reply. She began to shake and pound him. At last he woke up. With bated breath she repeated what Crispina had told her about the delivery of the children, and informed him of her resolution to free them.

Was it that Morpheus held him too tightly clasped in his arms, or that the timid streak in his veins as-

serted itself? In short, Cesare could not see the matter in Francesca's light. What did he care about those children? they were only peasants, he yawned.

Neither promises nor threats could get him out of his warm bed. Throwing one of the pillows over his head, so that Crispina should not hear his screams, our doughty heroine gave him a good pounding and left the room.

At daybreak, as was her custom, Crispina arose, and before attending to her manifold duties about the house looked into the child's room. Her knees gave way: the bed was empty.

Stifling a cry, she ran into Cesare's room—he was there fast asleep.

Where was the girl?

She searched for her all over the castle before giving the alarm, but no trace of Francesca. At last she decided to wake the father.

The ringing peals of the tocsin told the peasants that something was wrong, and in swarms they came rushing up to the castle. The Count quickly told them what had happened, and assisted by the servants they began to scour the country around.

The sun came out over the lake, when the dejected Count, who had led one of the exploring expeditions, returned to the castle, in hopes of some news. None of the others had yet returned.

Cesare had meanwhile arisen and was asking for his breakfast. The worried servants paid no attention to

him, and angered by what he thought their disrespectful indifference, he complained to the Count.

The unhappy father, hardly listening to him, gave orders regarding the pursuit of some gypsies who had been seen in the neighborhood, thinking they might have stolen his child for the purpose of levying ransom.

At last it dawned upon Cesare what the excitement was about, and he told the Count what had happened during the night, of course omitting his cowardice and the pounding Francesca had given him. Count Alberto and his men, taking Cesare's clew, set out for the ruin. Within half a mile of it, they found the child fast asleep in the grass, with her little hands clasped as if in prayer.

She had carried out Crispina's instructions to the letter. Her stout little heart had got her within a short distance of the place, and there, while waiting for the first cockcrow, nature had demanded its due, and she had fallen asleep, just as she wanted to say her prayer for the deliverance of the poor children.

For a few minutes the father stood speechless, looking at the sleeping child; then something within him began to melt, and the tears streamed down his cheeks. He picked her up carefully so as not to wake her, and carried her the long distance to the castle, clasped in his arms.

This incident brought about a great many changes. On the verge of losing his child, he became aware of her existence, which in his selfish grief for the mother he

had quite forgotten. Soon after, his sister Pamela took up her abode at the castle; Father Pietro, a priest from the sacred college in Rome, arrived; and the two took charge of the education of the children. The Count himself was often present at their lessons, and in many other ways manifested his love for the daughter found so suddenly and unexpectedly.

The next eight or nine years passed uneventfully. The wild bumblebee of a girl, under aunt Pamela's guidance, became a well-behaved young lady, and Father Pietro, with unceasing effort, succeeded in hammering enough knowledge into Cesare's head, to enable him to enter the Theresianum in Vienna.

Count Alberto's plans regarding Cesare were quite ambitious. The time when every nobleman could climb the ladder of fame by dint of his sword alone was past; besides, the boy did not relish the idea of camp and strife. Of course the church was open to him, but Cesare being the last St. Angelo, this was out of the question. The Theresianum, where they prepared young nobles for the diplomatic service, was the proper place for him.

A favorite theme of brother and sister during the long evenings was an eventual marriage between the two children. Cesare being the lawful heir to the estate, Francesca would have to be cut off with an annuity and Castle Pionetto on the banks of the Adda.

The Count was not blind to Cesare's shortcomings and defects, his weakness of character, his indolence;

and while his main thought was to make a comfortable bed for Francesca, he was thoroughly aware that a marriage with his daughter would be the best thing that could happen to the boy. She had all the qualities he lacked and he could trust her discretion. She would always remain the power behind the throne.

The question whether Francesca loved her cousin did not much trouble the Count. Marriages were not made in heaven in those days—at least not many. He took what he thought the wisest course for all concerned. The estate must be kept intact.

Once resolved, he acted. Aunt Pamela was instructed to put the advantages of such a marriage before her niece, and he himself noticing Cesare's infatuation for Francesca, did everything to encourage it. Before leaving for the Austrian capitol, after duly asking the father's permission—a mere formality—the young count proposed to Francesca in proper form, and she, as becoming a dutiful daughter, gracefully accepted him.

After Cesare's departure, Father Pietro left the castle, and, for his faithful services to the family, was installed at the vicarage at Binasco, a village belonging to the St. Angelos. He had taught Francesca what a lady of rank was supposed to know, and had done his duty towards the boy. She could read and write, and spoke a little French and German, had read a few books carefully selected by Father Pietro; and now it was aunt Pamela's turn to initiate her in the mysteries of deportment and

intricacies of the phraseology customary at the courts. Four more years passed. Francesca with her father and aunt had gone to Torino, where she was installed as lady-in-waiting to the Queen of Sardinia.

Cesare was still pursuing his studies in the gay capitol on the Danube.

Meanwhile great events had thrown their shadows across the universe. A people had risen in arms, thrown off the shackles of tyranny and declared its independence.

At Bunker Hill, to the roaring of cannon and the sounds of Yankee-doodle, a democracy was born. The nations of Europe were not much affected by that event over-seas, except France, who, anxious to see her old rival humbled, had sent to the rebels arms and men.

What irony of fate! Despotism lent her sword to liberty.

Lafayette, Lameth, Bouillés and Rocheambeau crossed the ocean to help the colonies in revolt. Liberty triumphed, aided by despotism, and the Frenchmen returned to their native country. Proud England swallowed the bitter pill, but the arrow from across the channel rebounded, and hit the marksman. The men who returned from the newly founded Republic had seen liberty face to face and felt her blessings. In the salons, the cafés, they began to tell their gaping countrymen of their experiences.

"The rights of men—the benefits of constitutional government—equality before the law," and more such

hitherto unheard of ideas were freely discussed in public. Like an infectious disease they spread to the humble dwelling of the workman and artisan, and from there to the huts and hovels of the millions of poor, commonly called "the rabble," who were slowly dying of starvation.

First in a low, hardly audible moan that could not be heard at the steps of the throne of Saint Louis, then louder and louder arose the clamor of the oppressed, of the idea-infected. At last a shrill, discordant cry was heard in the midst of the festivities at Versailles.

Many physicians were called in to give relief to the national patient. Calonne, Vergennes, Necker, took their turns, but none of them understood the nature of the malady. For a time there was hope. One doctor, Mirabeau by name, seemed to have properly diagnosed the case; but this effulgent sun went down before its rays had time to put new life into the patient lying in his death's throes.

He grew tired of being treated by quacks, and began to doctor himself. The system was congested—he applied leeches and nearly bled himself to death. On the 21st of January, 1793, the startled world learned of the execution of Louis XVI. He fell a victim of the revolution, brought about by an antiquated system, hastened by the vileness of his father.

From the Baltic to the Mediterranean rose a cry of rage, of revenge!

The kings ordained by the mighty hand trembled on their rickety thrones. The spirit of revolution had to be crushed, the Sans-culottes annihilated before the evil spread among their own subjects. Old rivalries were forgotten, coalitions were formed against the common enemy.

On rolled the torrent, and no coalitions could dam it.

As in the case of the people across the Atlantic Ocean, there was a nation imbued with the spirit of liberty fighting against the hosts of mercenaries following the command of their king. They were swept from French soil like gravel by the waves.

Count Alberto, Francesca's father, had followed the events in France with great interest. His rage at the news of the overthrow of the monarchy was boundless, but when the confirmation of King Louis' death reached Torino, he broke a blood vessel and died. Francesca took his body home, and he rests by the side of the woman he so loved.

Cesare came from Vienna and took possession of his inheritance, but he was not allowed to enjoy his new inheritance in peace. The enemy had crossed the Alps, and the King of Sardinia called his subjects to arms, Cesare, not inclined to exchange the comforts of Castle St. Angelo for the discomforts of camp and its dangers, was satisfied with the occupation of killing game on his preserves.

A new star had arisen from a little island in the Medi-

terranean, and the Holy Father himself, beginning to feel unsafe in the chair of St. Peter, sent proclamations to the remotest villages of the peninsula, commanding the peasants to exchange the plow for the sword.

Francesca made a vow that she would not marry as long as there was a single Frenchman on Italian soil. This had its effect on Cesare; he offered his sword at the altar of his country.

There is nothing in the records of the regiment about Cesare's heroic deeds. Nevertheless he soon became a Lieutenant, a Captain, and at last aide-de-camp to General Colli.

Some trouble with the tenants required his presence at St. Angelo, and Francesca had that very afternoon received his message announcing his arrival. It was the thought of this message that stopped her at the gate of the park.

CHAPTER IV.

FIRST MEETING.

After a few moments of reflection, Francesca retraced her steps. Cautiously keeping in the shadow of the trees, lest one of the ruffians should take a notion to come to the window, she reached the spacious corridor which separated the banquet hall from the reception room.

How was she to let Crispina know that she had not gone? The door of the hall was half open, she peeped in—there he was, the big brute with the vicious face, who had insulted her, at the head of the table, stretching himself in her father's armchair. To his right and left, with their coats unbuttoned, puffing big volumes of pipe smoke, lounged his companions. Near the fireplace sat Crispina, who, though she seemed to be mending some old garment, nevertheless kept a sharp lookout from under the brim of her headgear.

But what was that?

A dark skinned woman, in gaudy rags, was dancing to the squeaky sounds of a bagpipe, played by a boy in the familiar costume of a piper of Savoy, while a man

whose features betrayed kinship to the dancing woman, was beating time on a tambourine.

The woman, egged on by the plaudits of the spectators, became wilder and more extravagant in her contortions. Her eyes gleamed, little beads of perspiration rolled down her heated cheeks. She yelled something to the man with the tambourine, in a language unknown to the listener outside, urging him to play faster. Higher and higher flew her rags, exposing part of her dark-brown sturdy limbs.

Francesca turned in disgust.

A thundering salvo of applause told her that the creature had finished.

"More wine," droned a voice already familiar to her.

"We are infernally thirsty," howled the rest.

Turning toward the room again, she saw Crispina put down her sewing, and scowling at the man, take the earthen jugs from the table and make for the door.

This was her opportunity.

Noiselessly she glided along the dark corridor to the door leading into the courtyard.

The hinges creaked—her heart stopped beating.

Had they heard it in the hall? She stopped to listen.

No, the little squeak, which to her in her anxiety had sounded as loud as the trumpets on the day of judgment, was drowned by the shouts of laughter of the troopers. Leaning her weight against the door, it gave way, and she was outside.

Immediately after, she heard the tread of Crispina's sabots on the stone floor of the corridor.

"Who's there?" asked the old woman as she opened the door.

"Hush, it is I," whispered the girl, closing Crispina's mouth with her hand, to prevent her from screaming.

"Madre di Dio, Contessa! Haven't you gone yet?"

Her knees were shaking, she nearly dropped the earthen jug when she recognized Francesca.

"Why did you come back?" she gasped.

"Have you forgotten Conte Cesare? He may come at any moment, we must warn him."

Voices in the corridor made Crispina tremble anew. Taking hold of Francesca's arm, she tried to pull her across the yard to the cellar. Francesca, realizing that they would not get there in time, freed herself and hid behind a statue of St. Domenico in a recess of the wall. Luckily for her, the frightened servants had forgotten to renew the oil in the eternal lamp over the saint's head. Crispina rushed toward the cellar, but before she reached it, the door to the corridor flew open and four Frenchmen stood on the threshold.

Perceiving the peasant, who stood there fumbling with the keys, her poor trembling old hands not being able to find the hole in the lock, they stepped forward.

"Sacre bleu, what's keeping you so long, you old hag? Don't you know we are thirsty?"

Oh, that voice! Francesca knew it but too well; it

belonged to the beast who had had the audacity to put his soiled hands on her face.

Crispina had by this time opened the cellar.

"I wish I could drown you all in one cup, you rufians!" she exclaimed. Shaking her fist at them, she slammed the cellar door into the face of the big fellow, who, angered by her words, rushed after her.

He tried to open it, threw his big bulk against it, pounded, kicked it. At last his senseless rage spent itself. Wiping the perspiration with the back of his hand, he turned to his comrades: "I wager we'd find more than wine in the cellar, if we followed the old witch," he panted.

"Peste, you may be right, Sergeant!" said an old fellow, pulling his long gray mustache. "Only ——"

"Only what? Corporal Barsac, what are you afraid of?"

"The Captain," meekly replied the old soldier addressed as Corporal, "I don't know how he would take it."

"Barsac de Tours, you are joking! That Incroyable who leaves a cloud of patchouli behind him wherever he passes—you're a humorist!" He began to laugh till the tears came to his eyes.

"Who laughs last, laughs best. Sergeant Rastiboulois, you'll have cause to regret it."

The Sergeant had drawn nearer to the old fellow, and stood facing Francesca. She could almost have touched him.

For a second or two, she thought he had seen her—she shuddered as she looked into a visage in which every vice had left its imprint.

The Corporal's words did not seem to make much of an impression on Rastiboulois; he snapped his fingers, and to give weight to his action, he added:

“Your milksop of a Captain be damned!”

Now the Corporal's ire was aroused. He turned to one of the troopers standing in the doorway.

“Hulin, you were in the regiment in '91?”

“Yes, Corporal,” Hulin replied, taking the pipe out of his mouth.

“Do you remember the death of poor Malin?”

“Sapristi, as if it had occurred yesterday—I won't forget it as long as I live!”

“Tell the Sergeant how it happened,” he said with a touch of malice in his voice.

“It was a few days after the National Convention had made Louis Capet a prisoner. A commissaire arrived from Paris to swear the regiment to the Republic. He was seized, thrown into prison. The regiments were called out, and the General and the Colonels were going from troop to troop haranguing the men to remain faithful to the king, march upon Paris and deliver him. Our Colonel begged, entreated, and so did the officers—they were all aristocrats. But our Captain—you know he is a *ci-devant*—sat his horse like a statue. I held right behind him. Malin, carried away by the Colonel's

words, drew his sword and shouted: 'Long live the King!' The Captain wheeled around his charger—a flash of lightning—the report of a shot—and Malin fell from his horse. Sharp and clear rang out the Captain's voice: 'Right turn! Trot!' And we galloped back to the barracks. But for him, we might now be fighting each other, instead of the Austrians and Italians."

Silence reigned for a few moments after Hulin had finished speaking.

The slamming of a door made them turn in the direction the noise came from.

Crispina, with the jug filled to the brim, had come out of the cellar. A glance at the men, and from them to St. Domenico, told her that they had not discovered Francesca's hiding place.

She quickly crossed the now moonlit courtyard and entered the castle.

"Here is your wine," she murmured, as she passed Rastiboulois. But the Sergeant, for the time being, was too preoccupied to notice her.

The tale of the young *ci-devant* who had the nerve to shoot a trooper in the twinkling of an eye for shouting "Long live the King," and scorned the chances of being cut to pieces by his brother aristocrats, indicated that that was a dangerous man to run athwart.

"Do you still think I'm a humorist, Sergeant?"

"Peste!" ejaculated Rastiboulois, and without further comment he went inside.

Barsac chuckled and nudged Hulin with his elbow; it was his turn to laugh. He whispered something to the trooper, but what it was Francesca could not hear.

The door was slammed to; she knew they had gone, and left her hiding place.

What now? How could she warn Cesare? Upon Crispina she could not count—heaven knows how long it would be until she could come out again. The best thing to do was to wait for him on the road.

But by what road was he coming?

After all, he was a man, she only a woman. Why should she not leave him to his fate, and look out for her own safety? No—no, impossible!"

In her heart of hearts she feared he would do something that would disgrace the coat he was wearing, and bring shame upon them all. But how to prevent—how? She racked her heated brain, but found no solution. The little foot stamped the ground in helpless rage.

First of all she must get out of the house. The door to the corridor was half open, she entered, and slowly, cautiously walking on tiptoe, reached the hall door.

"Diavolo!" Just as she passed it, it opened and Ras-tiboulois, with the gypsy woman in his arms, stood on the threshold.

Pulling herself together, she tried to appear unconcerned. She even attempted to hum a few bars of a song, and walked straight to the big portal of the castle.

The Sergeant, his eyes riveted on the face of the lus-

cious, if ragged beauty by his side, paid no attention to her. Not so the gypsy woman; she had seen something glittering on Francesca's hand—a diamond. Like a wild-cat she jumped after her and clutched her fingers.

Francesca, taken by surprise, involuntarily turned around. The feeling of revulsion which made her look away when she saw the woman dance, came over her again at physical contact with the creature.

Quickly stepping back, she freed herself from the woman's grasp, and indignantly faced the gypsy, measuring her from head to foot. The woman's eyes sought the ground under Francesca's steady glare, and like a whipped animal, she retreated toward the Sergeant, furtively scowling.

The light coming from the open door fell full upon Francesca's face glowing with the flush of anger, and upon her magnificent hair. Rastiboulois recognized her immediately.

"Sapristi, our beauty of this afternoon! Come in and aid my friend here in filling our goblets," he bawled out, taking hold of her uncereemoniously.

Francesca realized too late what a mistake she had made by allowing herself to be carried away by her feelings. She quickly made herself smaller by a few inches, and assumed an attitude more in keeping with her garb. "Certainly, Monsieur, why should I not? The French soldiers are gentlemen, and will do no harm to a helpless girl." This she spoke with the accent of the peasants of upper Italy.

The troopers, curious to know with whom the Sergeant was conversing, appeared in the doorway.

"A cup of wine that I may drink the health of this fair one!"

One of the soldiers, in compliance with his request, handed him his goblet, and taking the jug from Crispina's hands, he filled it to the brim.

Rastiboulois raised his cup and bent down until his eyes were on a level with Francesca's.

"To your bright eyes, ma belle, and may hell take the man who would not stake his all for them!"

He drained the cup, flung it over his comrades' heads into the hall, and tried to pass his arm around Francesca's waist.

"Now a kiss, you red-headed vixen, to show there is no ill feeling."

"Leave the child alone," came from Crispina, who had elbowed her way through the soldiers, and interposed herself between the Sergeant and Francesca. "Can't you see that you are frightening the life out of her?"

"Shut up, old owl!" He shoved Crispina aside. A few troopers laughingly took hold of her, and pulled her back into the hall.

Rastiboulois pressed Francesca close to him, and bent down to kiss her.

As the face with the black mustache reeking with wine and tobacco came close to hers, she lost all control over herself.

The little fist shot out and hit him clean between the eyes.

For a second the fellow was staggered, not so much by the force of the blow as by surprise. He reeled back and relaxed his grip. Boiling with rage, which increased at the merriment of the troopers who had watched the little intermezzo, he yelled hoarsely at the girl, who stood immovable with a flash of defiance in her eyes: "You and I, my little cat, are going to have a talk in yonder room!"

Francesca looked about helplessly, her limbs seemed paralyzed, she could not move; a black mist seemed to envelope her as the burly Frenchman approached.

He lifted her from the ground like a feather. At his touch all the strength which a moment before had left her returned. Setting her teeth, she struggled with all her might against his embrace. Her screams for help reached Crispina, but alas, the old woman was inside, held at bay by Hulin, Barsac and several troopers who played with her cat-and-mouse, thinking it great fun.

Francesca felt her strength leaving her again; saying a prayer to the Virgin Mother, she closed her eyes and swooned away.

Rastiboulois had almost reached the door of the reception room, when he felt some one was obstructing his way. Thinking it was one of his comrades, he thundered: "Out of my way!" emphasizing this remark by a kick at the shins of the man blocking his path.

A gentle voice, on account of wine and lust unfamiliar

to him, calmly commanded: "Put down the girl, Sergeant."

"The devil I will!" he replied, pressing forward with the entire weight of his body. "Get out of my way or I'll kill you!"

Two hands which seemed to be made of steel, took hold of his arms like a vise, and forced him to relax his grip on the girl. He dropped her, but before he could see who his assailant was, he felt the stinging cut of a whip across his face.

Throwing himself upon his adversary, he forced him into the light, in order to get a look at him. His antagonist allowed himself to be pushed into the hall without further resistance.

The Sergeant's face as he looked at the man was a study. It was the "Incroyable," the "milk-sop," that aristocratic Captain who slew Malin, the king's friend.

Like lightning, the story Hulin had told him about the poor trooper's untimely end flashed across his brain. With the instinct of self-preservation, he drew his sword and aimed at the Captain's head. Egalité stepped aside, and Rastiboulois, carried along by the force of his own blow, fell headlong to the floor.

He was up again in an instant, but by that time the young *ci-devant* had drawn his sword and was ready to receive him. Hulin's shout to the troopers: "Boys, the Captain!" called attention to his presence. They, open-mouthed, watched the spectacle enacted before them.

Here were the two best blades of the regiment clashing against each other, and it was only the toss of a coin which would get the best of the fray.

Rastiboulois seemed to have the advantage in height and strength, but this was more than offset by the Captain's leopard-like agility. The Sergeant's furious assaults put Egalité at first on the defensive. Without breaking an inch of ground, carefully watching every move of the big fellow, his sword was as an impregnable wall of steel. Rastiboulois, once a fencing-master of some renown, employed all the tricks he knew; but he had met his match.

Jumping backwards, forwards and sideways, he tried to draw out his opponent, but the Captain's eye was as true as his steel, he gave his opponent no opening.

The Sergeant's breath grew shorter and shorter; perspiration broke out over his body as he felt himself weakening. Egalité, seeing he had his man at his mercy, changed his tactics and took the offensive. He danced around him like an athlete amusing himself. In Rastiboulois' eyes the Captain seemed to multiply. He saw at least six Egalité, so rapidly did he move about.

With the courage of despair, he made a last attempt to turn the tide in his favor. Jumping back out of reach of the captain's blade, he changed the sword from his right to his left hand. Simultaneously with him the captain had moved forward; his blade hissed through the air and Rastiboulois's flew across the hall.

A blow in the face delivered with the hilt of the sword sent him reeling to the ground

Ere the astonished watchers knew what had happened, Egalité stood over the prostrate body, and was chastising the Sergeant with the flat of his blade.

The troopers began to murmur threateningly at the humiliation inflicted upon their comrade; as one man they rushed to his assistance. Several put their hands on their sword hilts.

Francesca, recovered, had risen with the help of Crispina, and breathlessly watched the contest between the two swordsmen.

The skill and courage of her champion aroused her admiration. The thought of Cesare crossed her mind; she could not help comparing her handsome, effeminate cousin with the sturdily built figure standing there, calmly parrying the vicious onslaughts of her assailant.

Her pulse beat higher, her muscles contracted and her body swayed mechanically with the Captain's moves, backwards, forwards, sideways. There was something savage in her outcry of delight, as the Sergeant's sword flew from his hand and crashed into the mirror, breaking it into a thousand fragments.

She clapped her little hands exultantly when the big fellow went to the floor, felled by the blow of his adversary.

The fighting blood of the St. Angelos surged to the surface, and broke through the veneer of external culture.

Pia St. Angelo embraced Dario Farnese, her husband-to-be, after he had conquered all comers in the list, unmindful of the blood trickling through the crevices of his armor, staining her white brocade robe.

Crispina whispered something to her and tried to take her away, but Francesca's attention was arrested by the troopers.

She saw their half drawn swords, heard their muttered imprecations against the young officer, whose boundless rage saw nothing but the coward on the ground who had raised his hand against a helpless woman.

A shrill "Prenez garde!" from a female throat made Egalité raise his head. It was high time, the men were already upon him.

A sweep with his weapon sent them back to sword's length; beating down their arms with his blade, he leaped into their midst with one bound, like a lion attacked while over his prey.

"Ventre St. Gris, who speaks? Mutiny? I'll have you all court-martialed and shot! Are you soldiers of the great Republic or brigands? 'The Terrible,' your General baptized you for your gallant conduct under fire; as a badge of honor it is inscribed upon your flag! 'The Terrible' you are—to women and children! Fie upon such soldiers!"

The fumes of wine had evaporated, and the soldiers of the Republic, stung to the quick by the words of their Captain, began to see their actions in the proper light.

Some of them, be it said to their credit, even blushed. Discipline, force of habit, did the rest. Involuntarily they fell in line.

Egalité sheathed his sword and abstractedly tugged at the ends of his little black mustache.

The troopers stood "attention," waiting for his orders.

He felt for something in his pockets. At last found the object of his search, a jewel-studded snuffbox. He took a dainty pinch of snuff in his fingers.

His nonchalant glance met that of the Sergeant, who had scrambled to his feet.

Rastiboulois tried to look defiant; his bravado, however, was short-lived.

The words of his chief, "Corporal, take six men and stand your Sergeant against a wall," drove every drop of blood from his cheeks.

The men stood immovable, feigning not to have heard the command; the murmur of dissatisfaction rose anew.

The dark brows over the Captain's eyes contracted, the snuffbox wandered back into the pocket of his dolman, and in slow measured steps he walked over to the men.

His compressed lips and distended nostrils betokened the storm raging within him. He fixed his gaze upon face after face until the murmur subsided, and then repeated his order.

The Corporal stepped forward, and the six men, whose

names Egalité called out, followed his example. They took the Sergeant between them and marched him to the extreme end of the hall opposite the door.

Francesca had heard the Captain's words but did not understand their meaning. She saw the preparations, the process of blindfolding. At last it dawned upon her—her assailant was doomed to be shot before her eyes.

The troopers were loading their carbines.

She tried to speak, but horror paralyzed her throat; she could not utter a sound. The Corporal's interrogation: "Ready?" the men's answer: "Ready," told her that only seconds stood between the Sergeant's life and eternity.

With her hands raised imploringly and agony written over her face, she threw herself at Egalité's feet, and gasped out in her native tongue: "Mercy—mercy, Signor, mercy!"

The soldiers halted and turned.

The girl's attitude, her clasped hands, the streaming tears, told a tale without the aid of words, and the carbines raised to the level of Rastiboulois' breast were lowered again.

Egalité, after giving his orders, had relapsed into his reveries. A thousand and one thoughts were surging through his brain. The conduct of his troop filled him with indignation and disgust.

This army of the Republic had crossed the Alps in

fulfillment of a mission; like the crusaders, nearly eight centuries ago, they carried an emblem for which they were willing to die. "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," were the words woven into their flags. France had a message to give to the world, and they were the standard bearers of the new creed. Ill clad, poorly fed, with bare feet, despite internecine feuds, they had resisted the overwhelming hosts.

They were fighting for their homes, their newly acquired liberty. How all this had changed within a few weeks by the will of one man. The crusaders for liberty had become a herd of hungry wolves, disregarding everything and everybody, bent only upon prey.

Centuries back his mind wandered to the time of Theodoric's blond-maned barbarians, who had pounced upon this same Italy as their land of promise. Perhaps on the very spot he stood, another daughter of Italia had also struggled against the embrace of one of Theodoric's blue-eyed warriors. At the foot of the Vesuvius Teja fell, and with him burst the big west-gothic soap-bubble.

As conquerors they had come, and as conquerors the Italians regarded them. History was repeating itself. Where were they, the heroes of Mondovi and Montenotte, going to find their Vesuvius? Who was going to be the Narses against whose phalanxes French valor would prove to be of no avail?

These reflections were not pleasing to the young re-

publican, and it was small wonder he was not in a forgiving mood and harshly replied to the entreaties of the girl kneeling behind him.

But Francesca was not easily discouraged. She took hold of his hand, and mustering her French, she said: "Pardon him, Monsieur—he is already punished enough."

He glanced over his shoulder and the rough words died upon his lips.

The beauty of the fair suppliant bewildered him; lowering his head in confusion, he apologised for his incivility, and helped her to her feet. He was obviously embarrassed, but instead of regaining her composure, she became conscious of her position, and thought of flight.

Suddenly she remembered the loss of her slipper in the struggle with Rastiboulois, she saw herself hobbling to the door, and this increased her discomfiture.

Egalité noticed her uneasiness, and looked about searchingly for the cause. His eyes alighted upon the tiny high-heeled slipper on the floor near the door of the hall.

Once more he turned to her, and tried discreetly to ascertain whether the dainty object was really hers. Francesca had, however, raised the unshod little foot and hidden it from his gaze in the folds of her frock. She felt his inquisitive glance taking her in, inch by inch, from that magnificent head, down to the well-

turned ankle in red silk stockings. A half good-natured, half ironical smile crept into his face at the end of his investigation. Again he pulled at the ends of his little mustache and tried to catch her eye, but Francesca kept obstinately looking for something on the floor.

He fetched the cause of her distress, and handing it to her, whispered: "Mademoiselle, for a word from the possessor of such a foot, Jove would lay down his thunder. Pray accept my apologies for the bad behavior of my troopers."

The tone of his voice was so soft, so insinuating, she could not resist its charm, and when he offered his hand to escort her out of the hall, she laid hers into his with a grateful glance, although she knew she would loathe herself for doing so later on.

At the door, still holding her hand, he bowed most reverentially, and before she could prevent it, he raised it, and pressed his lips upon the rosy tips of her fingers.

Her dignity forsook her at his audacity. Tearing her hand out of his grasp, she flew up the stairs like a deer that had scented the hunter. Crispina slowly followed.

CHAPTER V.

"RENEGADE."

Egalite's eyes followed the slender form until it vanished at the turn of the staircase landing. He could hardly tear himself away from the spot.

This little quid pro quo had left its impression, and inclined him to be lenient. Even the sight of Rastiboulois could not ruffle his temper.

He called him to him, and gave orders in a voice which vainly tried to be severe.

"Sergeant, report to me to-morrow. Now mount with your men and ride on until you reach the bridge at Binasco. There dismount, and wait for me. Keep under cover, and let no one cross unless you get the password, 'Beware and Beaulieu.'"

They marched out; he followed to the porch. Passing the staircase his glance stole up to the landing, in hopes of catching a glimpse of the beautiful creature who had disappeared there a few moments before. Outside he heard the Sergeant's command: "Mount—trot," and the clatter of hoofs dying away in the distance.

He lingered a little longer, but no sound came from the floor above; he went in search of poor old Coquin,

whom he had left tied to the gate of the park, to put him into the stable.

When he returned to the hall, he found Crispina waiting on an old gruff-looking soldier, who wore the uniform of his own regiment.

"By my pipe," ejaculated the old fellow as he caught sight of Egalité, "back again? Where the devil are the men?"

"On the way to the Binasco bridge, where we'll join them as soon as Coquin has his oats. Where have you kept yourself all this time?"

"I was asleep in one of the rooms upstairs." He chuckled; "the old woman told me you had a lively time with that rascal of a Rastiboulois. A dangerous dog, Captain. Why did you send them to the Binasco bridge? Anything wrong there?"

"I'll tell you presently, Lieutenant Laporte."

Addressing himself to the old peasant woman, he asked her to see that Coquin got some oats, which she promised to do, and disappeared. After assuring himself that no one was within hearing, Egalité told the Lieutenant of his adventures during the day. His meeting with the general-in-chief he mentioned briefly, without telling him any of the details, but dwelt upon his report to General Augereau, because it was directly connected with the work cut out for them that night.

Laporte manifested little interest; an occasional snarl was all Egalité could get out of him; for the rest, he con-

tinued to give his close attention to the delicious looking ham and the bumper of wine before him.

The food at last found its way into the capacious stomach, being washed down by the last drop in the bumper; wiping his bushy gray mustache, Laporte grunted pleasantly, like a man thoroughly satisfied with his meal; leaned back in his chair and lighted his pipe. Egalité, who had declined the invitation to join him, was annoyed by the apparent indifference of his Lieutenant and began to pace the floor.

"What's up? You haven't told me the gist of the General's orders," said the old glutton, noticing the unusual nervousness of his superior.

"They got wind at headquarters of an exchange of dispatches between General Colli and the Austrians. This is the only road that has so far been unoccupied by our troops, and Augereau thinks we are likely to trap one of their messengers by keeping a close watch at the bridge."

"By my pipe!" The news seemed to have some effect upon him. Thicker and thicker the clouds of smoke came out of his mouth, enveloping his ruddy face in a grayish-blue mist, until it disappeared entirely from the Captain's view, and a beautiful pale woman's face, crowned by a golden halo, appeared in its place.

Egalité broke the silence.

"I wonder who she is."

"Who?" came from out the clouds.

"The girl with the beautiful hair. Lieutenant, if there are such beings as angels, she is one of them. Diantre, what a beauty!"

"Do you mean the red-headed baggage I met in the corridor just before I came down?"

"Lieutenant, you are a fool."

"By my pipe, Captain ——"

"No offense, comrade. I meant to say, you are on the wrong track if you take her for anything but a 'grande dame.'"

"Do you mean an aristocrat?"

"If you like the word better—yes."

"I hate aristocrats."

"Nobility is a prejudice, I admit—but to resume our conversation. I say she is a 'grande dame.'"

"Bah! You are dreaming."

"Am I? Have you ever seen a peasant with such a foot? Diantre, I shall dream of it."

"My month's pay against yours, she's a peasant!" The Lieutenant held out his hand to clinch the bargain.

Egalité waved aside the proffered hand, and continued with the air and tone which never failed to put Laporte's nerves on edge:

"There is a certain *je ne sais quoi* about a man or woman of blood which betrays him or her, even in rags. It is the shibboleth of nobility, and no matter how many revolutions you make, Lieutenant, blood will always tell."

These sentiments reminded Laporte of the Captain's

lineage, a thing the staunch old republican could not forgive him for. As he expressed it, he ought to have been more careful in the selection of his parents. He waxed furious.

"I wonder that a man with such ideas lends his sword to the Republic!"

Egalité knew that this was his Lieutenant's weakness, and it sometimes pleased him to tease the old fellow. He could hardly hide his merriment as he looked into Laporte's face, which had become livid with rage.

"Ah, Lieutenant, you have put your finger on a sore spot—I am a half-breed—a mongrel. In my veins the blood of the de la Tours is diluted by that of the Breteuils, good old Breton peasant blood."

A blue sky and a smooth sea after three days of storm could not have a greater effect upon a seasick voyager than this remark had on Laporte.

"By my pipe—old Breteuil?" he exclaimed gleefully. "Former intendant of the royal domains, the friend of Danton and Herbert, was he a relative of yours?"

"He was my grandfather on my mother's side."

"The devil!"

Laporte always had a penchant for his young comrade, ever since he had joined the regiment—now he loved him. His curiosity was thoroughly aroused, he forgot to relight his pipe, and plied Egalité with questions.

The peasant woman returned with wine and a cup on a silver tray and offered it to Egalité with a quaint courtesy,

"May it please you, Signor—it is the best we can offer."

Egalité took the cup and smiled at Crispina. "Have you recovered from your shock, mother?"

"Thank you, Signor Soldier—quite recovered. We folks in the mountains have strong nerves."

"I dare say you have," Egalité replied laughingly; then with a side glance at Laporte, he inquired for "her beautiful daughter."

Crispina paused for a second; she did not know what to say. Keeping Francesca's identity a secret had done more harm than good. This young soldier inspired her with confidence—perhaps it was wiser to tell the truth. Her face broadened into a grin, and with as much contempt as she could muster, she replied:

"My daughter? M'ph! Your eyesight must be bad, Signor, if you could take the Contessa di St. Angelo for my daughter."

Egalité dug his riding crop into Laporte's ribs, "I'm dreaming, eh?"

The old Sans-culotte angrily cleared his throat, and walked over to the window. The very idea of an aristocrat had upon him the effect of a red rag shown to a bull.

Egalité for the time being ceased teasing the old man and continued his conversation with Crispina.

"Where are the lady's parents?"

"They are both dead."

"H'm, an orphan? Poor girl—has she no relatives?"

"Oh, yes, Signor. A cousin, the lord of the manor—he is in the army; and an aunt, Contessa Pamela, who left the castle yesterday. She went to Pionetto, our Contessa's own estate beyond the Adda, at the news of the approach of your soldiers. Contessa Francesca is going to follow her as soon as I can get some horses for the carriage. Contessa Pamela, in her great haste to get away, took everything that had four legs."

An old woman will chatter; Crispina would have gone on forever, had not Francesca herself made her appearance.

She had changed her peasant's garb for a fawn-colored dress of a soft material. A riding switch was in her hand.

"Has Crispina taken good care of you, Monsieur?"

"Thank you, Contessa, we are very comfortable." He rose and went to meet her.

Francesca blushed slightly and smiled, as he addressed her as "Contessa," and two bewitching dimples showed on her now rosy cheeks. If her beauty in her simple garb had made an impression on the young Captain, she now captivated him completely, and he could hardly restrain himself from clasping her in his arms. He conquered the mad desire, but his eyes, the mirrors of the soul, told plainly enough what he felt, and Francesca was not slow in noticing it.

It flattered her a little, not too much, just a little;

there is no woman born without a touch of vanity. Methinks Eve made Adam eat the apple just for the sake of testing her power over him—and the haughty Contessa was a daughter of Eve. To escape his steady gaze of admiration, she sat down on the chair he had pushed over for her, and commenced to draw figures on the floor with her riding crop.

Both kept silent for some time.

She could not bring herself to treat him, her champion, with the icy polite indifference that would have raised an invisible barrier between them; a barrier which he, no matter how audaciously he spoke with his eyes, would not dare overleap with his tongue. On the other hand, she was afraid of hearing something which she would not care to hear, if she gave him the slightest encouragement.

Egalité was perfectly contented to look at the vision before him—a spoken word might break the spell.

Francesca instinctively felt his gaze. The silence becoming embarrassing and oppressive, she broke it and said, trying to make the conversation as impersonal as possible:

"Why don't you French people leave the world in peace? Why must you invade our beautiful Italy, and bring the awful scenes of war among these quiet hills?"

"This war, Contessa, is not of our making. We are merely defending ourselves, and the first rule of warfare is to carry the war into the enemy's country. The kings

of Europe, fearing the breath of freedom coming from France, tried to interfere in our internal affairs by force of arms, and we resented it."

"The kings of Europe have to avenge the murder of their brother!"

"Murder, Contessa?"

"Yes, murder!"

"The hand of destiny dethroned Louis XVI," he answered solemnly. "That man died for the sins committed by his father. I shall not try to justify the deed; yet I am afraid it was a sad necessity. In this war, right is on our side. We fight for liberty, equality, humanity; the kings of Europe for prejudices. We will conquer, as our sister republic across the ocean has conquered."

"You have not conquered yet! Wait until you encounter the flower of my country. They will drive you back across the Alps—you and your blood-reeking Jacobins!"

"Diantre, Mademoiselle! If the nobility had treated these Jacobins as human beings, the Jacobins would not have chopped off their heads!"

In the heat of the discussion he had quite forgotten himself—his voice, usually so soft, had become hard and metallic. The girl before him, for the nonce, ceased to be an object of adoration, and became an abstract principle—the principle which he abhorred, for the abrogation of which he had fought and was still fighting—the

tyrannous principle which found expression in the answer made by Louis XIV to an expostulative magistrate, "The State ?—I am the State!"

Francesca did not know what to make of the man. The inference she drew from his manner, his appearance, was that she had to deal with one of her own kind; but his words, his sentiments were not compatible with that idea, and she determined to make sure by asking a leading question:

"How is it you astonish me with such words, Monsieur ?—you who seem to be a man of birth ?"

"The shibboleth," murmured Laporte, who had listened to the controversy, shaking his gray head. "They scent each other like dogs."

This was no company for him and he went out to the stable to get the horses ready.

Egalité had regained his composure. He was vexed with himself for allowing his temper to get the better of him. After all, one can be a republican and have good manners at the same time. He had not even introduced himself; her question gave him the opportunity to make amends for his discourtesy.

"Mademoiselle, in days gone by, I answered to the name of Marie Honoré Henri, Marquis de la Tour d'Auvergne. I have since changed it for the shorter 'Citizen Egalité.'"

"Renegade!" came hissing from her lips. She almost spat it into his face, and shrunk from him as if

in fear of contamination. He turned white to the lips, his chest heaved, his eyes flashed, his fists clinched until the nails dug into the flesh. He mastered himself, however, and only a slight tremor in his voice betrayed the storm raging within him.

"You are a good Christian, Mademoiselle?"

Francesca, not knowing his intent, and in turn moved by his tones, said falteringly, the tears rising to her eyes: "I hope so."

"Your Redeemer was a renegade!"

She screamed and crossed herself three times at this blasphemy. He continued relentlessly, despite her attempts to silence him.

"Blood had to flow before the cross conquered the world—blood had to flow again because His teachings were misinterpreted; but beneath a scaffolding of barbarism a temple of civilization was building; to-day out of this sea of gore a new, a better world will rise, in which it will not be sufficient for some of us to be born to enjoy all the pleasures of life, while millions of others, for the very same reason have to suffer and endure, until it pleases a merciful providence to call them from earthly misery—a world wherein all shall have equal right to happiness, and every man shall be what he makes of himself. For this we fight, for this we are ready to shed our blood. We may not live to enjoy the benefits of our sacrifices, but the seeds we sow will bear fruit, which perhaps our sons, if not they, coming generations, will reap."

Francesca could not quite follow the thread of his ideas; it was all so new to her and so different from what she had been taught; but his utterances had the ring of conviction—she felt he believed every word he said. That generous little heart of hers expanded, she would have liked to beg his pardon then and there; but he turned his back upon her to speak to the Lieutenant, who had returned to declare it was time to mount.

The presence of the churlish old Sans-culotte caused her to swallow the words already on the tip of her tongue. She went over to the open window and pretended to take no further notice of the French soldiers. Egalité offered Crispina some money. The old woman indignantly refused to accept it. With a low, ceremonious bow in the direction of his hostess, he walked out to the porch where Laporte was waiting with the horses. They mounted, and the old fellow, urging his horse into a trot, cut across the lawn.

Egalité, remaining on the path, had to pass the window at which Francesca, with the obstinacy of a woman who feels she is in the wrong, was still trying to convince herself that she was in the right. He raised his hand to his shako and saluted; she acknowledged the greeting by a slight nod of her head. He shortened the reins, and Coquin stopped.

"I understand, Contessa, you wish to leave this place for your other estate beyond the Adda to-night."

"Such is my intention, Monsieur."

"To get to the Adda you will have to pass through our lines?"

"I don't know, Monsieur."

"Will you have to cross the bridge on the road to Binasco?"

"I believe so——"

"Very well; in case your carriage should be stopped on the way, the password 'Beware and Beaulieu' will see you safely through to your destination. Good-night."

During this little conversation he had looked straight before him, she might have left the window without his noticing it; with the "good-night" he cut Coquin across the neck and without turning, galloped on until he caught up with Laporte.

Francesca, tossed about by the waves of conflicting emotions, followed him with her eyes until the darkness swallowed up horse and man.

CHAPTER VI.

"BEWARE AND BEAULIEU."

The two men rode on in silence. In front of the wall surrounding the spacious park they came to a stop. They had missed the way to the gate. After a short consultation, they dismounted and led their horses, keeping close to the wall.

The moon had disappeared behind the clouds; the darkness became almost impenetrable, they could hardly see each other; nevertheless they pushed on, Laporte cursing every time his horse made a misstep. At last a thick patch of underwood made further progress in that direction impossible.

Egalité halted and suggested the advisability of retracing their steps. Suddenly the clatter of hoofs coming from the road beyond the wall reached their ears. They listened—the sounds came nearer.

"A horseman coming up the hill," whispered Egalité.

"Who can it be? By my pipe, perhaps one of our men returning to make a report. Let's call him."

"No; I hear no clanking of arms—hush!"

By that time the horseman had slackened his speed on account of the steepness of the hill, and was slowly

approaching the place where the two soldiers stood rooted to the spot

Egalité waited until he had passed them, on the other side of the wall, then gave Laporte the reins of his horse, unbuckled his sword, laid it softly on the grass, and without a word disappeared in the thicket.

Laporte heard the noise of breaking twigs and branches—then all was silent; even the noise of hoofs had ceased.

Egalité broke his way through the brushwood; now and then he stopped to ascertain whether the horse was still going the same way. He had nearly reached the end of the thicket; he halted again and listened; this time he heard nothing. His eyes had meanwhile become accustomed to the darkness; he saw the gate they had been looking for—and there was the man too.

Egalité held his breath, he did not move an inch, for fear of betraying his presence.

His horse securely tied, the man opened the gate and entered the park. He seemed familiar with the locality, and took the direct path to the castle without the slightest hesitation. It was too dark to distinguish his features, but Egalité noticed his clothes. He was dressed in the garb of a peasant, wore a broad brimmed slouch hat, but his easy carriage and elastic gait were not in keeping with his dress.

This puzzled Egalité. Who was the man who entered the premises so unceremoniously at this time of night? It was evident he was no stranger here, and that he was

no peasant. He must have a reason for disguising himself. Egalité determined to find out this reason.

The stranger pursuing his way had meanwhile passed out of sight. Egalité waited a little longer, and then as noiselessly as possible made his way out of the thicket toward the park gate, to get a good look at the stranger's beast and its trappings. There was nothing suspicious about the latter, but the horse itself was a thoroughbred—no mistake;—our captain knew something about horseflesh.

He mused for a few seconds. Suddenly General Augereau's words: "You might trap one of their messengers, if you kept a careful watch at the bridge," came back to him.

The blood of his whole body surged to his head.

"Diantre, if the stranger were——!—why not? Everything pointed that way. Egalité turned and ran through the dark alleys toward the castle as fast as his feet would carry him. His spurs became entangled in the branches of a young tree lying across his path; he stumbled and fell. This accident cooled his ardor for the moment, and while picking himself up, he reflected upon the foolhardiness of his undertaking. In the first place, he was unarmed and the stranger, if he was what he suspected, certainly would carry weapons about him.

Egalité resolved to be more cautious. He removed his spurs;—they hindered his progress and their click-click was likely to betray him. He took off his pelisse and

shako, and put them under a tree where he would be able to find them again, provided he still needed them after his encounter with the stranger. Having thus divested himself of everything that might encumber the freedom of his movements, he started in pursuit of the man. He reached the lawn in front of the castle;—the stranger had disappeared.

He lay down and like a snake wound his way through the low grass until he found himself within ten or fifteen paces of the mansion. The hall was still lighted, the windows open. He heard voices within. He paused for a second and raised his head, to see whether anyone was watching outside. Presently he heard the tread of sabots on the gravel. It was the old peasant woman.

She looked about, put her hands to her ears, and listened intently. After having satisfied herself that no one was in the vicinity, she re-entered the house. Egalité heard her steps on the stone floor of the corridor, the slam of a door: after that nothing but the voices in the hall broke the silence of the night.

Creeping on all fours, he reached the gravelled path. There was the rub—to get across without making any noise. He took off his boots, and moving as cautiously as he could, at last reached the open window. He could hear every word spoken inside.

A woman was saying: "Can't you take me with you? You are going the same way." Egalité recognized the voice of his hostess.

"No, dearest," answered a man, evidently the stranger. "I carry important dispatches, my trip is a very dangerous one, and I cannot subject you to the hardships I will have to undergo for the next few days."

"Oh, take me with you! I'd rather face all dangers, than another day like this."

"Impossible, dearest. I must reach the Austrian headquarters before noon to-morrow. The fate of our country depends upon it."

"I thought our court had commenced to negotiate peace with the Sans-culottes."

"Only to gain time. General Colli is coming up by forced marches; he will reach the banks of the Adda on the 11th. General Beaulieu is to elude the French until Colli is within striking distance; then they will have the Corsican between two fires, and before the world is a week older, we will drive this canaille back into their pest-hole called Paris."

Egalité could contain himself no longer; he had to get a glimpse at the man.

The window was about eight feet high; taking a good grip on the sill, he pulled himself up until his eyes commanded a view of the room.

Sure enough, there was the man in the peasant's dress. He could not see his face, for he sat with his back to the window. In front of him on the table, Egalité noticed two pistols.

Francesca, standing behind him, leaned on his chair;

her arms rested on the edge of its back, supporting her head; her face was buried in her hands.

Crispina entered with a carafe and some cups.

"Something to eat—quick. I must be on my way again in half an hour!" called the stranger when she appeared in the doorway.

"Yes, Signor Conte, in five minutes you shall have a Zuppa Inglese that will hold body and soul together," and she waddled out as fast as her heavy sabots would permit.

The French captain had heard and seen enough. He let himself down to the ground, and as noiselessly as he came, made his way back in search of Laporte and the various pieces of equipment he had left behind.

Meanwhile the couple within, blissfully unaware of the fact that their conversation had been overheard, continued:

"You are disappointed, Francesca?"

"No, no." She tried to appear cheerful. "Two or three days will pass quickly. I am not worrying for myself, but the thought of the dangers you are going to encounter makes me tremble. The roads are full of French soldiers; we had some here at the castle."

This news made the man in the peasant's garb put down his cup. Had Francesca looked up at that moment, she would have noticed that his hands trembled. Her words seemed to have deprived him of the power of speech. He stared vacantly at the wall in front of him;

the cup in his hand slid out of his grasp and dropped to the floor. He reached for his pistols, put them in his belt, rose and paced the floor.

"Corpo di Dio—General Colli was wrongly informed," he muttered half mechanically to himself, and then addressing Francesca more directly, he added: "We thought the roads from here to Lodi were still free. Confound it, I wish I had not been so hasty in offering my services!"

He threw himself into a chair, and supporting his elbows on his knees, hid his face in his hands, as though greatly agitated.

Francesca looked up. What she feared—what had made her turn at the park gate—confronted her. She knew Cesare was not cut out for a hero. Why, then, in heaven's name, had he undertaken such a mission?

She easily found the answer. At headquarters they had thought the roads were still free, and Cesare, knowing every path for miles around, had volunteered in the hope of earning some bloodless laurels. Alas! at the first intimation of danger, his nerve failed him!

She blushed to the roots of her hair; this man was her husband-to-be! The picture of another man came before her mind's eye, and for the second time she was compelled to make comparisons. He was a greater coward than she had thought—but what was to be done? He must go, or forever be stamped a coward before the world, and a disgrace to the name of St. Angelo. This she must prevent at all costs. The world must not know.

Walking to the chair on which he sat, she took his hand and forced him to look into her face.

"Cesare, you must go," she said hoarsely, "you must!"

"To be taken and shot? Mille grazie."

"Think of your General, who trusts you, who, thinking you have delivered his dispatches, will advance in hope of co-operation and meet with defeat! Think of the hundreds—of the thousands—who will uselessly lose their lives!"

"H'm," he muttered with contempt, "a few hundred more or less of the cattle—what does it matter?"

"Oh, that I were a man! How glorious to die for one's country!"

"What benefit does my country derive if I am shot?" Getting up, he took hold of Francesca and continued sophistically: "Don't you see, if I am captured the dispatches will be taken from me; our plan of action will fall into the hands of the Sans-culottes and enable them to beat us with our own weapons."

The girl looked squarely into his eyes—he lowered his; what he read in them was not complimentary to him. He knew she had seen through him, and no amount of Jesuitical casuistry, such as he had learned at the Theresianum, would make him anything but a coward in her estimation. He felt a little uncomfortable for the moment, but then—why not let her think what she liked? He was getting decidedly tired of playing the knight-errant; he preferred being a living coward to being a dead hero.

Now that it was over, and she knew, he felt easier; there were no more misunderstandings. He helped himself to some wine, and candidly and unblushingly informed Francesca of his intentions, which were, to return to headquarters and report inability to get through the French lines.

Francesca could control herself no longer.

"You coward!" she cried. "You coward! Give me your dispatches! A St. Angelo has undertaken to do this, and a St. Angelo must carry it out."

He looked at her incredulously until she stamped her foot and repeated her words. On second thought it did not seem such a bad idea. Nobody would suspect her. He began to enlarge upon the subject, but his fiery kinswoman's scornful laugh interrupted him in the midst of his argument. He took the dispatches from the tops of his boots, where they were secreted, and meekly offered them to her.

Francesca tore them from his hand.

"Wait for me at Father Pietro's!" Without a further look at her future husband, she rushed out of the hall and up the stairs to her room.

Cesare was somewhat crestfallen at this impassioned outburst of his fiancée, but the happy-go-lucky blood of his Austrian mother, his long association with the frivolous inhabitants of the imperial city on the blue Danube, permitted him to shake off impressions as a duck shakes water off its back.

By the time Crispina came with the food, he was in the proper frame of mind to enjoy a good meal. Cesare dismissed the old woman after she had set the table, and told her to see the Contessa, who would probably be in need of her services.

Crispina left the hall, and the delinquent dispatch-bearer set about the pleasant task of supplying his inner organism with the necessary fuel. He heard footsteps behind him. Thinking it was Crispina, he continued to give his undivided attention to the delicious "Zuppa Inglese." He reached out to fill his cup—the decanter fell from his hand. On the wall opposite to him he saw the shadow of a man. He jumped up as if bitten by a tarantula, and knocked his head against the cold barrel of a pistol. The shock was so great that he forgot all about his own weapons, threw up his hands, and fell back in his chair.

The man standing over him quickly removed the firearms from his belt and threw them to another who had just entered through the door.

"Don't move if you value your life," uttered the man nearest to him.

The mist before Cesare's eyes began to clear away, and by and by he recovered sufficiently to realize his position. He recognized the uniforms of the two men. They were French hussars. He thanked his lucky star for having got rid of the dispatches.

"What do you want?" he stammered.

"Your dispatches for General Beaulieu," replied the younger of the two, whom by the braid on his shako, he made out to be a Captain.

"You are mistaken, I have no dispatches."

"We know better!" thundered the old fellow, coming close to him, holding a second pistol to his head.

"I give you five minutes to hand over your dispatches," said the other, as he took out his watch and deposited it on the table, where Cesare could see its face.

"The five minutes have begun." He spoke calmly, even gently, but Cesare felt he would none the less make good his threat.

He watched the hands of the little timepiece on the table—he heard the tick-tick, and counted the seconds. One minute had elapsed—it had seemed to him an eternity.

How was he ever going to live through the next four? The watch had such a fascination for him he could not take his eyes from it. Two minutes—three—the cold perspiration broke out all over his body—his heart began to flutter—he closed his eyes, and fainted away.

Steps in the corridor caused Egalité to look up. His erstwhile hostess briskly entered the hall.

Perceiving the two soldiers, she stopped. A glance at Cesare in the chair revealed the situation to her. Egalité bowed coldly.

"Pardon me, Mademoiselle, for again interfering with your comfort; but I must request you to retire to

your room until our interview with this gentleman is ended."

She nodded in acquiescence, bowed slightly, and Egalité thought he heard her going up the stairs.

He turned to Cesare, who had opened his eyes and was wildly staring about him—they finally rested on the pistol in front of his face.

"You would not murder me in cold blood?"

"No, Monsieur, you shall have a chance for your life. Laporte, lend the gentleman your sword." He drew his own and took his position.

Handing Cesare his sword, Laporte remarked with unusual politeness:

"After the Captain, I shall claim the honor."

Cesare was a clever fencer, and with a little nerve could have held his own with anybody. He took the weapon, examined it like a connoisseur, and saluted.

The lieutenant commanded: "En garde." They began.

After a few thrusts, Cesare felt a cut in the arm and dropped his sword. Egalité picked it up and handed it to him, but Cesare had had enough. He returned the weapon with a slight bow and announced his willingness to submit to a search.

Egalité sheathed his sword in disgust. "Search him, Lieutenant."

"Take off your coat," grumbled Laporte.

Cesare complied with the order. The old fellow went through his pockets. "Nothing"

"Proceed."

"You shock my modesty, Monsieur."

Laporte pushed him into a chair. "Don't talk so much, and hurry; we can't fool with you until tomorrow."

Egalité looked into all the places about the room where the dispatches could possibly be hidden; Laporte meanwhile went through the prisoner's breeches. "Nothing."

"Take off your boots," commanded Egalité.

Cesare remonstrated against such undignified treatment, but Laporte quickly jerked them off despite protestations. "Nothing."

"Ask the women to come down, Lieutenant."

Cesare rose and airily confronted Egalité.

"I hope, Monsieur, you are going to treat Contessa di St. Angelo, my fiancée, with all the respect due to her station."

"Ah, whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"Conte Cesare di St. Angelo, on whose premises you are, Monsieur."

"The Comtesse is to be congratulated upon her choice, Monsieur le Comte," said Egalité, bowing ironically.

"What do you mean, Monsieur?"

"I mean that I am glad to meet one of the 'flowers of Italy' face to face." He made another mock courtesy.

"You are making game of me, Monsieur!"

"I should not dare, Monsieur le Comte."

Laporte's heavy footsteps were heard coming down the stairs hurriedly.

"The women have gone!" he screamed outside. "I can't find them!"

"Gone? Ventre St. Gris!—" Egalité looked at Cesare, who tried hard to suppress a smile. "Fools that we were—they have the dispatches!"

"They won't go very far, Captain; our men will stop them at the bridge!"

"Damnation, *I have given her the password!* The horses, Laporte! our horses—we must overtake them!"

With gnashing teeth, cursing everything that wears a petticoat, Laporte hurried out to comply with his orders.

Egalité turned upon Cesare and raised his crop to strike him, but he thought better of it, and the hand already in the air came down again, as he looked at the pitiful object of his rage. The poor coward had thrown up his arms to ward off the blow, like a scared apprentice cowering before his master.

Egalité's wrath subsided; he could only soil his hands by laying them upon the sorry creature, and there was almost a ring of pity in his words: "I should not have thought it possible, Monsieur, that a man could be so devoid of honor as to allow a woman to go on an errand like this!"

A howl that woke all the birds half a mile around reached the Captain's ears; he dashed to the window and

saw Laporte running in the avenue of light from the window toward the castle.

"Damn them, Captain—damn them! they have taken our horses!" roared the ponderous and frantic Laporte.

The Captain's heart stopped beating; he rushed out to meet his Lieutenant.

"It can't be!" he shouted with the rage of despair, shaking the old soldier, whose body swayed like a sapling in an October storm, under the furious grip of the young officer.

"Speak, say no—say it is not true, you are mistaken—you must be!"

"They have gone!" repeated Laporte hopelessly, freeing himself from Egalité's vise-like hold.

The old man felt sorry for his young companion-in-arms, who, half dazed, had sat down on the stairs. He knew what was in store for him if he reported the facts to General Augereau.

"Woman, woman," he mused sententiously, "you are the cause of all evil in this world. How many men you have lured from the path of duty to ruin and destruction; how many more will go the same way, while this world lasts and woman's favor is the axis around which everything turns." Thus Laporte spoke to himself, if not in these exact words. He commented mentally upon the sadness of these facts as he looked upon the latest victim of woman's craft.

Egalité's reflections were less ethical. Though much

an idealist, by inheritance from his mother he could be very practical when confronted by emergencies of the nature of the one he had to face at the present moment.

He reiterated to himself the sequel of events since his arrival at the castle, in hope of finding a last straw to which he could cling, a means of averting the plunge into the chasm that had opened beneath him. The result of his mental research was disheartening.

The women were well mounted and Laporte and he had no horses. The women had at least half an hour's start and must by this time be near the bridge—if they had not already crossed it. The troopers had no reason to detain them, they knew the password.

Up to the last link everything was without a hitch—but here he paused—he felt there was a break of some kind—what was it?

Once more he went over the same ground—he had it!

He jumped up and startled the old fellow by the joyful vehemence of his utterance. "They are going to stop them—they will recognize the trappings of the horses—they are going to stop them and bring them back here!—Listen!—Do you hear anything?"

They strained their ears. Nothing but an occasional rumble of distant thunder broke the peace of the night.

Suddenly something must have struck him, for the Captain bounded across the lawn and disappeared in the shadow of the trees. Laporte called after him, but receiving no answer, followed, leaving Cesare in the room.

Egalité had remembered the horse he had seen Cesare tie to the post outside of the gate. The thought lent wings to his feet. Through wood and underwood he tore his way to find the horse—gone!

Utterly discouraged, he sat down on the curbstone to the right of the gate. The hope of the women being stopped at the bridge now seemed a pretty slight one. He took the pistol from his belt, pushed the ramrod into the barrel to make sure the bullet was still there and laid it cautiously alongside him on the ground. This done, he unbuttoned his uniform and brought forth a little medallion.

It contained the miniature of a woman, his mother. He looked at it in the glimmering rays of the rising moon for some time, kissed it, put it back in its place and reached for his pistol. He knew disgrace was waiting for him at headquarters, nothing but the penalty he was going to impose upon himself could save him from it.

What was that?

He heard something in the distance that made him lower the weapon already at his temple—a faint staccato of hoofs.

He lay down flat and listened, his ear to the ground.

There could be no mistake—horses' hoofs; twice four feet, he distinguished.

"They are bringing her back!" There was a gleam of triumph in his eyes as he rose from the ground.

Half way down the hill the road took a sharp turn

once past it, he knew he could get a good view of the long village street and the road to the bridge beyond.

He dashed down the hill; the road lay before him. Emerging from the village, he distinguished the outlines of two horses. What did it mean? Only one was mounted, and its rider was leading the other. Had they not stopped them, after all? His excitement was intense. Without giving himself time to breathe, he rushed on. The horses had disappeared behind a little clump of trees at the foot of the hill, but Egalité, by the shape of the high shako and the plume, had meanwhile been able to make out the rider; it was one of his troopers. Tearing around the bend of the road, the man nearly knocked him down. The noise of the horses' hoofs on the rocky road drowned Egalité's shouts. Luckily he caught one of the flying reins; running alongside of the riderless animal until he had a good grip on the beast's mane, he swung himself into the saddle.

The trooper, seeing the familiar uniform, checked his horse, but Egalité, all out of breath, could not speak and motioned to him to turn. Setting the pace, he raced through the village streets in a manner that made the sparks fly from under the horses' hoofs. The peasants in their beds, sat up and crossed themselves as they heard the mad chase pass their windows.

The last houses of the village were left behind. Captain Egalité urged his mount to do its utmost. Stretch-

ing head and neck until they seemed to be on a line with its quarters, it gamely responded to the pressure of legs and hands. By and by the strain began to tell, and though the noble animal struggled on bravely, the rider felt that it was breaking down, and dropped the stirrups in order to land on his feet in case of accident. The horse faltered—a cut with the whip straightened him out again, but only for a moment—then it began to roll about like a rudderless ship in an angry sea.

Egalité heaved a sigh of relief; the dull, hollow thud of the hoofs pounding wooden boards told him that he had reached the bridge!

Muskets before him, and the shout of the sentinel forced him to draw rein. He stood up in the stirrups and looked back for his companion, but could see no trace of him. Giving the horse a hearty slap, he dismounted.

Sergeant Rastiboulois, leading his own horse by the bridle, emerged from the darkness to make his report.

"Has anyone tried to cross the bridge, Sergeant?"

"No, Captain."

"How is that possible? Two women must have passed!"

"The men that I sent out to reconnoitre reported the existence of a ford a quarter of a mile below. The women may have ——"

What the women might have done did not reach the

Captain's ears. At the word "ford" he had jumped upon the Sergeant's horse, and digging his heels into the animal's flanks, raced away in pursuit of the girl who had taken his soldier's honor with her.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE VICARAGE.

It had rained during the night. An impenetrable mist enveloped the village of Binasco and the country surrounding it. The sun had once or twice tried to break through the dark heavy clouds, but with poor success. It was and remained a bleak, disagreeable morning, dismal and oppressive, and the weather had its influence upon the inhabitants of the little hamlet, who stood about gloomily in the central square, which bore the pretentious name "Plaza Romana." The peals of the tocsin during the night had brought together the peasants and shepherds from the remotest farms, and there was no family for miles around that did not have at least one member among the assembly in the Plaza Romana.

The Podesta, leaning against the well, was the center of a group of excited villagers, discussing the contents of a placard nailed to the door of the courthouse.

This board was generally used for the purpose of announcing issues of local interest; that, for instance,

Giacomo Corsi's cow had gone astray, or that Andrea Celli's goods and chattels were on such and such a date to be sold to the highest bidder, and other matters of like moment. News of that kind was usually known to the inhabitants long before it was made public by dint of the board, and for that reason no one ever stopped to look at it. But the white placard posted the night before was of far greater importance. It was a proclamation of the government inciting the peasants of Lombardy to rise in arms against the French invaders. Underneath the gubernatorial script, as an appendix, stood General Buonaparte's address to the army of the Republic, translated into Italian. It read:

"Soldiers, you are naked, ill fed; the government owes you much, and can give you nothing. The patience, the courage you showed in these mountains are admirable, but they procured you no glory and you got no credit for what you have done. I will lead you into the most fertile plains of the world. Rich provinces and great cities shall be at your mercy—there you will find honor, wealth and glory. Soldiers of the army of Italy, will you lack courage and determination?"

The villagers stood like Hercules at the crossway.

They had to choose between two evils: Either to take the field to be shot down by the Sans-culottes, or "wait to have their property taken away from them, by these

very same Sans-culottes;" the latter, according to the proclamation, would be the case if they did not take up arms to defend their hearths.

No wonder they were downcast at the prospect; they had nothing to gain, and everything to lose.

As a counter-move to Buonaparte's proclamation, this manœuvre of the Austrian cabinet was undoubtedly very clever; but the trouble was, these peasants of Lombardy had no love for the "tedeschi," so the document on the courthouse door aroused fear, consternation, but no enthusiasm.

The sun had now broken through the clouds, the mist had given way to the victorious rays; but not to be dispersed was the gloom which the piece of parchment had cast into the hearts of the villagers. Suddenly the sounds of a drum made all turn in the direction of the village gate.

A man and a woman had alighted from a rattletrap van, drawn by a horse which in looks fairly rivaled Don Quixote's famous mare Rosinante. The man, in the ragged costume of a scaramouche,* pounded the drum, and the woman danced to the beat of the tambourine in her hand. They were the mountebanks who the previous night had entertained the French soldiers at the castle of St. Angelo. For a few seconds the villagers looked on, then, shrugging their shoulders, most of them dispersed to return to their homes and consult with their

* A juggler.

wives about the steps to be taken. They were in no mood to enjoy either the antics of the pagliacci, or the terpsichorean offerings of the woman attired in rainbow costume. The two mountebanks were greatly distressed by the lack of appreciation displayed by the peasants. The man hurriedly discarded the drum and with his hat in hand waylaid the yeomanry of Binasco in hopes of getting a few coins. Kicks and shoves were all he received for his trouble, and cursing under his breath in every dialect of Europe, he returned empty-handed to the van. After a short consultation with his companion-in-art, they boarded the van and pursued their way.

An eighth of a mile from the village, on a gentle slope, stood the church and vicarage of Binasco.

Approaching from the village, one came first upon the vicarage. It was an old solidly built two-story structure; four heavily barred windows on the north side commanded a view of the fields and the village beyond, and three windows faced the road. A spiked wall, following the line of the highway, connected the house with the little church, and continued beyond the church, inclosing the cemetery on the south side, and the courtyard between the church and house. The way of access to the vicarage was a solid oak door, in the middle of the wall between the two buildings.

The door was open and the mountebank, leaning out of the van, peeped in. To his left was the church and the vestry door, to his right on the other side of the

yard, a door leading into the house; in the center a well. In front of the house under the windows were a stone table and bench.

The table was set, the dominie's breakfast was evidently waiting for him. From the church came the sounds of female voices singing the "Hora," and from that, the mountebank judged that the priest was holding service, and was not likely to disturb him. He gave the reins to the woman, and alighted from the van. His eyes were attracted by some silver spoons on the table, and it was his intention to punish their owner for letting valuables lie about in so reckless a manner, to the evil tempting of poor devils like himself. Keeping his eyes on the doors to right and left, he made his way toward the table and the objects of his desire. But before he could reach the spoons, a peasant girl, a decanter in one hand and a lantern in the other, came sniffing and crying out of a trapdoor leading into the priest's cellar.

"Teremtete!" he swore under his breath.

The girl, frightened by the sight of the stealthy and brigand-like stranger, gave a scream. Her fear, however, quickly gave way to wonderment. In an instant she saw a pair of legs dangling in the air—the man was walking on his hands. After the performance of this little feat, he pirouetted gracefully, threw kisses at her and grinned. She looked at him in amazement. "Who are you?"

"Caramba—corpo di Bacco—teremtete—Arullo, bellissima ragazza! have you not heard of great Arullo?" he replied glibly, and introducing the woman, who after having driven their crazy vehicle behind the church had joined him, he went on: "This, Encarnatione, beautiful Encarnatione, who read the hand, tell the past, present and the futuro—who can tell if the lover is true—or give little drink, and he never forget you—all for little silver."

"Why you cry, mi cherida?" inquired the gypsy woman drawing nearer cringingly, seeing the tears in the girl's eyes.

The peasant girl began to sob anew. "Caramelo my lover, that good-for-nothing, is going away to fight the French—he'll never come back! they'll kill him!"

"Ah, bellissima, you dunno—Encarnatione will tell—Encarnatione know everything—she read from hand."

"Si, si," affirmed the gypsy's consort persuasively.

The girl looked doubtfully at the palms of her hands, rubbed them clean on her apron, and held them out to Encarnatione.

"She say, he soldier boy," whispered Arullo to his accomplice in their own patois. The latter looked at the girl's hand, and uttered a string of moans: "Yoi—yoi—yoi—hm—hm—oh—oh—Dios—Dios! You have lover, he brown, young, beautiful!"

"Y-e-s"—the girl gaped wonderingly at the oracle.

"He gone away."

"Yes, yes!" Her wonderment increased.

"He has beautiful coat, and feather on head."

"Yes, he's gone to be a soldier." This last proof of the gypsy's infallibility capped the climax—her eyes hung on the woman's lips, who kept on studying the lines in her hand.

"How do you know?" There was a touch of awe in the question.

"Ah, I see in hand—yoi—yoi—everything in hand." She began to moan and tear her hair again at her latest discovery. "There is other ragazza!" As this was always the case, she knew she risked nothing by saying it; if the girl believed nothing else, she would surely believe that.

"W-h-a-t? another girl?—oh, the villain—he has promised to marry me!" she stamped her foot and began to cry piteously.

The gypsy woman, fearing she had gone too far, tried to calm her, but her words only served to increase the girl's heartrending rage.

Arullo had in the meantime reached the coveted table and helped himself to some wine and a piece of fowl; the spoons had already found their way into his pocket.

A noise in the vestry startled the trio, and the two mountebanks made for the door. They found their way blocked by the girl, who, wishing to know more about her supposed rival to Caramelo's favor, bid them stay.

"Go into the kitchen and wait—you must tell me the

rest when I come in—quick!" She pushed them into the house, just as the priest emerged from the vestry.

The dominie slowly descended the steps and walked over to the table. Like all Catholic priests he was clean-shaven, and had an air of dignity and benevolence, which inspired respectful confidence. He was a handsome old man, full of vigor, despite his sixty odd years; through his spectacles looked a pair of keen eyes, which spoke of native shrewdness and a great knowledge of human nature; in short, the sacred college in Rome had every reason to be proud of this graduate.

"Set the table for two, Peppina; I expect the Podesta."

"Yes, Father Pietro."

"Here is the key to the front door of the church; hang it in its place." He handed her a good sized key, which she stuck in her belt, it being too large for her pocket."

"What is there for breakfast?"

"Some eggs, fish, cold meat and a piece—" she stopped horrified. The piece of capon had vanished. "Er—er—the cat—er—has stolen the piece of capon left over from yesterday," she stammered, fumbling with her apron.

The dominie laughed good-naturedly, pulled her ear and remarked knowingly, "I think I know the *cat* that got the capon—the cat's name is Caramelo!"

At the mention of that name, Peppina's lachrymal glands opened again.

"What's the trouble, Peppina?"

"He is going away to fight the French," she sobbed. "All the young men are going, and he is going with them."

"You ought to rejoice instead of crying," sententiously remarked the dominie, fastening his napkin under his chin. "Look at our Contessa Francesca—her future husband, Conte Cesare, has joined the army, and with what fortitude she bears it."

"She'll find as many husbands as she wants, our Contessa with all her money—but—I—I? What will I do if Caramelo gets killed, or worse, if he takes another girl?"

"Send Caramelo to me before he starts. I'll give him something to wear around his neck."

Peppina brightened up, and dried her tears. "A charm that will make him bullet proof?"

Father Pietro tried to suppress a smile. He was too clever a man to say no; the girl would not have believed him if he had, and he confined himself to the noncommittal smile.

No answer is an answer, and we always take it to be the one we would like to hear best.

"Oh, I thank you a thousand times, good Father, a thousand times!" Peppina covered his hands with kisses and walked to the door—there she turned hesitatingly. She had something on her mind but did not know how to couch it in proper words. Finally she mustered courage and came back.

"Do you know how to make a love potion, Father, which will make him think of me all the time?"

For a moment Father Pietro was speechless; she thought on account of her request, and retired to a safe distance. His eyes threatened to pop out of his head, his face became purple, he was almost choking—as she thought with rage, but in reality because a bone had stuck in his throat.

Peppina was so frightened she forgot her respect due to the dominie and began to belabor his back with her fists. At last the obstinate little bone took a downward course.

Meanwhile the dominie had forgotten all about the love potion, luckily for her.

"Go down to the blacksmith's and tell him to send my horse here. I'm going to ride up to St. Angelo to see what our Contessa is doing. I'll probably stay there over night."

Peppina made for the door, and nearly ran into two women who had just entered. She stepped aside to let them pass; a glance at the younger one caused her to think there was something wrong with her eyes. The face seemed familiar and it didn't. The young woman reassured her as to her identity.

"Our Contessa, Father Pietro—our Contessa!" She threw up her hands at the sight she presented.

The good Father tore off his napkin and threw it on the table, adjusted his spectacles and rose to meet the unexpected guest.

It was indeed Francesca, but like Peppina, the priest hardly recognized her.

"By all the saints, Contessa, what has happened?"

Her clothes were damp and ragged, her dainty boots mud stained, and her beautiful hair hung limp into a face of deathly pallor. Dark heavy circles under her eyes, and nervous twitching lips told of some dire situation.

The old man was frightened out of his wits; he quickly moved towards her to take her hands; they were icy cold and trembled; had he not caught her in his arms, his former pupil would have fallen to the ground.

"Quick, a glass of wine, Peppina!"

Father Pietro's eyes sought Crispina, who helped him to carry her to the bench, but the peasant was too worried about her young mistress to notice his questioning glances. While the two women were trying to restore the Contessa, the dominie went to the door to look for her horse or carriage; finding no trace of either, the old man's anxiety increased and he returned to the group at the bench.

Francesca, under Crispina's vigorous treatment, had opened her eyes; she was persuaded to take a few drops of the wine, and presently she regained her power of speech.

The dominie could no longer check the flow of questions on his tongue.

"Madre di Dio, Contessa!—has anything happened to Conte Cesare?"

"No, Father Pietro, he is safe and well; you may expect him to-day," she said with a faint smile, upon which the priest put his own construction.

"If it is not that—then what is it—speak for the love of God!"

"Bolt the door, Father Pietro, that we may not be taken unawares, and I will tell you." Sitting up, she turned to Crispina: "You must go back to St. Angelo after you have rested."

"Contessa, you are going all alone?" asked Crispina trying to keep back her tears.

"I think I had better; Father Pietro will get me a horse and a change of clothes."

"Ah, Contessa, please take me with you."

"No, no Crispina—I think I can get on quicker alone."

"Well?" said Father Pietro, who having securely bolted the door, joined them.

"I am on my way to the Austrian headquarters with dispatches from General Colli."

"Madre di Dio!" The priest had to hold on to the table, so overcome was he. "My child, one would have to pass through the French army to get there!"

"I know it."

"And still——"

"I am determined to attempt it!"

Arullo had opened the door slightly and peeped out.

"No—no—no—my child, it is impossible." He sat

down by her, and patting her hand like a feverish child's, he tried to talk it out of her. "We will see if we cannot get someone else to go." He thought her mind was still wandering.

Guessing his thoughts, she pulled herself together to dispel them.

"Don't try to dissuade me, Father Pietro; my mind is fully made up." Crispina and Peppina had gone over to the church and sat down on the steps—the old woman telling Peppina of their night's adventures.

"But, child, how are you going to accomplish it?"

The poor old man did not know what to say, or what to think. Her speech was rational enough, though her ideas seemed so utterly absurd. Helplessly rubbing his hands, he stared at the breakfast still untouched on the table, while Francesca, who had repeatedly refreshed herself from the cup Crispina had handed her, enlarged upon her plan of action.

"Be kind enough to procure a horse and cart for me, and a basket of provisions. Peppina will give me some of her clothes, and I will try to pass as a peasant woman going to the market at Lodi, where the Austrians are entrenched."

Once more Father Pietro brought all his eloquence into play to dissuade her; but his pupil insisted: he had known her long enough to know that nothing would keep her from carrying out her scheme.

With a sorrowful shake of his head he gave his orders

to Peppina. "Go to the blacksmith and tell him to send up my horse."

Peppina departed; the dominie locked and bolted the door behind her.

"Thank you, Father. Where can I rest meanwhile? I'm tired out."

"You did not walk all the way from St. Angelo to Binasco?"

"No, we rode—but at daybreak we had to abandon our horses."

"Did you meet with an accident?"

"No, the horses belonged to the French Republic." There was a slight suggestion of humor in her voice.

He was puzzled more than ever; was she never going to tell him?

"My dear child won't you explain——?"

"Don't ask any more questions, good Father." She felt sorry for the poor old man, but nobody—not even *he* was to know the truth, or know of Cesare's shame.

"I have told you all I could, trust me with the rest until we meet again. Pray be so kind as to call me as soon as the horse comes." She walked to the house, and Crispina, who, not to be idle, had said a few "pater nosters" followed.

Father Pietro was not at all reconciled to her daring venture.

"I do not approve of it, but I will do as you wish, Contessa. Go to my room and lie down." He started

for the door. "I will go down to the blacksmith myself to hurry him up."

Francesca's exclamation: "Who's that?" stopped him.

"Who—where?"

Arullo, the object of Francesca's surprise, came forward.

"Arullo, illustrissima—Arullo—remember Signorina—last night St. Angelo? the scaramouche, and Encarnazione who do the dance——"

"Yes, yes, I remember—some mountebanks who performed for the French soldiers at St. Angelo last night."

"What were you doing in my house?" demanded Father Pietro sternly after recovering from the shock of seeing this vagabond.

"A beautiful girl tell me wait in there."

"Peppina? The little wench! Wait till she comes back! Let me search your pockets, and then begone."

The mountebank threw up his hands to let the domine search him—and why not? Encarnazione was taking care of the spoons.

"Ah, illustrissima, Arullo no steal—Arullo honest. Arullo come to serve the Signorina."

"Serve me, how?"

"Arullo listen what Signorina say to Illustrissime 'bout Eccellenza di Colli——"

"You heard!"

"No frighten, Signorina—Arullo will help—will take

you through French army—will take Signorina under nose of man with white face and eye of eagle—si—si—Arullo will—for *considerazione*.” He made the motion of counting money.

“ You mean you will take me through the French lines ?”

“ Si—si—”

“ How ?”

“ Little Guisardo, who play the pipa—oh—caramba—teremtete—the ingrata—I picks him up when he was a little boy, he run away last night—” he let his eyes glide down Francesca’s slender form, “ boy leave his pipa and clothes—Signorina make very fine little Guisardo.”

Francesca felt the blood rise to her cheeks at this suggestion; nevertheless, if she wished to carry out her plan, this was her opportunity. She looked helplessly at the priest; he, however, after turning this over in his mind, had other suggestions to offer.

“ Why not give him some money and intrust the dispatches to him ?”

“ No, no, that is out of the question,” Francesca replied quickly.

“ I do not trust him.” Giving a sigh of resignation, she turned to the smirking mountebank.

“ Listen, if you can take me through the French lines and *back here*, you shall have 500 lires.”

Arullo gave a howl and turned several somersaults of delight.

There was a loud imperious knock at the outside door, followed by another.

"Who can it be?" whispered Francesca to the dominie. The question was really superfluous—she knew instinctively who it was.

"In the name of the French Republic, open the door!" commanded a man's voice outside.

Arullo whistled softly and looked knowingly at Francesca.

They understood each other.

"A French officer who is in pursuit of us," she explained to the dominie. "Let us out through the church, Father."

Father Pietro felt for the key; "Santa Madonna!" he exclaimed in helpless despair, "Peppina has the key—go into the kitchen."

The man outside was losing patience.

"Diantre, open or I will break down the door!"

"Let him in quickly, Father—or he'll suspect—detain him at all costs until you find means to get me away."

They walked to the house on tiptoe—once Francesca and the scaramouche were inside, Father Pietro cleared his throat loudly and went to the door.

"Yes, yes, I am coming—have a little patience."

Francesca had guessed rightly—the man at the door was a French officer, the last man she cared to see at that moment—*Egalité*.

"You were long enough to exhaust the patience of an angel, good Father."

"I was in the church and did not hear you at first, Signor soldier. What brings you to my humble roof?"

The officer had entered briskly, his eyes wandered about suspiciously before they fastened themselves upon the face of the priest, whose countenance fairly shone with humbleness and benevolence.

"Where is the Podesta?"

"You will find him in the village, Signor soldier."

"In the village they told me I would find him here! Is he playing hide-and-seek with me?"

Father Pietro signified his lack of information by a shrug of the shoulders, which failed to improve the officer's temper.

"The whole village seems to be in an uproar—what is the cause of it?"

"I don't know, Signor," replied the priest, unruffled by the soldier's aggressiveness.

"You don't?"

The intonation he gave to these words expressed a world of doubt, but the good Father—was it because he was hard of hearing, or did he, like a good Christian, hear and forgive the man who doubted his veracity?—answered in the same polite, exasperatingly suave manner, "Can I serve you in any other way, Signor?"

"Get me a horse—mine lies with a broken neck in your confounded forest, the devil take it! Had it not been for your bells which rang out all night to guide me, I would have never found my way out of that wilderness."

Father Pietro mentally regretted the ringing of those bells.

"It will be impossible to secure what you ask for, Signor soldier; this is a poor parish. I don't know where to get a horse."

"You are an old man, dominie, so I won't say what I think; but you must get me the horse, and be quick about it. How many leagues is it from here to Lodi?"

"About seven."

"Is the road by which I came the only one from St. Angelo to Binasco?"

"There is only one to my knowledge."

"Ah! Now to the main question. *Have you seen two women pass on horseback within the last two hours? One young and handsome—a lady; the other a peasant.*"

For the first time Father Pietro's face paled and he tried to avoid the stranger's scrutinizing glance.

"Look at me while you answer," persisted the young soldier, coming close to him.

"*Two women on horseback?*" He covered his eyes with his hand, like some one trying hard to recall some event, but in reality racking his brain for an answer which he could reconcile with his conscience, without jeopardizing the Contessa's secret.

"*Yes, two women on horseback,*" Egalité repeated, laying stress on each word.

The few seconds had sufficed; Father Pietro was again master of the situation. Accentuating each word

as the young officer had done, he looked squarely into his eyes as he answered:

"*No, I have not seen two women on horseback.*"

"Diantre!" The soldier turned his back angrily, and Father Pietro indulged in a smile of satisfaction, which died away the moment Egalité faced him again.

"How is that possible? They *must* have passed here, if this is the *only* road between St. Angelo and Binasco."

"I don't know, Signor soldier. Your women *on horseback* (this was adding insult to injury) may have passed while I was in the church."

"Then I must ride off immediately. I give you twenty minutes by your church dial to secure the horse for me."

"I presume you are in pursuit of these two women, Signor?

"I am, dominie, but I shall give it up; on the horse you are going to secure for me, I will reach headquarters before they can do any harm."

"You might as well ask me to secure the command of a regiment for you." The priest looked as if he might have told the truth, and Egalité was considering the advisability of going on foot to the next village, when Peppina, appearing in the doorway, puffing and out of breath, shouted:

"The horse will be here in half an hour; it is being shod, Father Pietro."

The good Father's face was a study; his dignity forsook him and the torrent of oaths he uttered would have done credit to a trooper.

"Pack your things, you idiot, and the devil take you if you ever dare to show your face here again!"

"But Father, I——" The stupid little creature was so crestfallen, so bewildered at the priest's outburst, she even forgot to cry.

Egalité, to whom the humor of the situation appealed strongly, gave himself up to his merriment; at last pity for the poor girl compelled him to intercede in her behalf.

"Don't be angry with her, dominie. She could not know——" He stepped between them to protect Peppina. "Don't worry, my girl; the dominie will forgive you like a good Christian, when he realizes that your timely appearance has saved him much trouble. Am I not right, dominie?"

These words brought Father Pietro to his senses. He realized the mistake he had made when he let his temper get the better of him. He had not lost the game yet. A new plan of action was shaping itself in his ever active brain, and as Peppina had a part in it, he walked over to her with outstretched hands to beg her pardon in truly humble Christian spirit.

"Forgive me, my child, for my want of forbearance and for setting you such a bad example." Putting his hand on her head to bless her he whispered, "Run down

to the Podesta very quickly and tell him to come up with as many men as he can muster." Raising his voice to its natural pitch he added: "Run over to the carpenter and tell him to come up and fix the kitchen door."

Peppina, made happy again by the Father's kind words, made for the door, to find her way blocked by the soldier, who had locked and bolted it.

"The girl remains here until the horse comes, dominie." A humorous twinkle in his eye told the priest that the young soldier had seen through him.

Now it was the padre's turn to be disagreeable.

"This is going too far, Signor! Am I not master in my own house? Peppina, go and do as I bid you." He pointed to the door.

"Peppina, kindly stay where you are," was Egalité's polite rejoinder.

If there could have been any doubt in Father Pietro's mind regarding Egalité's distrust, the following words dispelled such illusions.

"Nobody leaves the premises until the horse comes. I have no desire to have the whole village up here. What key is that in your belt, my girl?"

"It is the key to the front door of the church."

"Ah, give it to me—there's a good girl—thank you. What about the house? No doors on the outside?"

"No, Signor soldier," meekly replied Peppina.

"Good—now sit down and take it easy, Peppina—the dominie won't mind, will you dominie?"

With Father Pietro's ill-humor, Egalité's politeness increased. The situation was now reversed; the consciousness of his victory made him good-natured.

The man in the cassock did not deign to answer—he frowned, bit his lip, and turned his back upon the wily Sans-culotte who had outwitted him.

"Come now, make the best of it, dominie." He patted him on the back. "In half an hour the horse will be here and you rid of me. Meanwhile oblige me with a glass of wine—my throat is parched—a morsel of food, and we will part good friends."

"There is my breakfast; I have not touched it," came curtly from the priest, who, sitting with his back to Egalité, had joined Peppina on the little stone bench at the well in the center of the yard.

"Thank you for your *cordial* invitation, dominie;" he looked at the delicacies on the table, "but won't you join me? there is plenty for two."

No answer.

"This looks very appetizing; are you sure you will not join me? won't you have something? really not? so sorry. Excuse me if I go on; I'm ravenously hungry; I haven't tasted a morsel in nearly twenty-four hours."

The truth of this assertion was borne out by the way he helped himself to the priest's breakfast. An occasional long draught from the decanter made him amiable—talkative. The meats from the plates had disappeared, and nothing but a dish of fruit was left of the opulent

breakfast destined for Father Pietro, who had now a double reason for his grudge against the intruder.

Egalité, having satisfied his appetite, took out his short pipe, and settling back comfortably in his chair, puffed away thoroughly self-satisfied. He began to look at the world, at Father Pietro, in fact at everything, through rosy spectacles. He had no grudge against the priest, and tried to conciliate him.

"Don't sulk, dominie; / really ought to be angry with you, for trying to hoodwink me, and see how good-naturedly I take it! You Italians are foolish to treat us as your enemies, instead of hailing us as your deliverers from the Austrian yoke. Come now, dominie, let us have a glass together, and then part friends."

In vino veritas, is an old truthful saying. The few glasses of wine Egalité had taken brought out his most lovable qualities. He had to do his duty, and duty compelled him to severity; now the disagreeable business being disposed of, the man of breeding came to the surface. There was not the slightest touch of rancor left in him against the crafty old man who had tried to outwit him and had nearly succeeded. Full of good-nature he kept on talking and trying to mellow the dominie, whose unwelcome guest he was, and to make amends for his former incivilities; but the priest was and remained irreconcilable; all efforts met with the same obstinate silence.

Finally Egalité gave it up as hopeless and confined

himself to the company of his pipe and the decanter, occasionally consulting his watch about the time. Twenty of the thirty minutes had elapsed, and he was getting ready to depart.

Father Pietro sat on pins and needles watching the shadow on the sundial, as it crept forward imperceptibly; every moment he expected to hear the blacksmith's knock announcing the arrival of the horse. Plan upon plan he turned over in his mind, only to discard every one as impracticable. They were prisoners until the man departed.

"Don't let him go, hold him at all costs," had been Francesca's words.

"Hold him—how? By force? He had but to look at the man to realize the absurdity of such an undertaking. Why should he not let him go? If he left, the road was free for her; and if he took the horse, let him take it, there were other and speedier ones than his to be had in the village.

The clashing of a sword against the stone bench caused him to turn; the soldier was looking for his shako which had fallen to the ground; he was ready to go. The dreaded moment was at hand.

As Egalité bent down to pick up his head-gear, the dominie noticed that he was somewhat unsteady on his legs. A new idea flashed through his brain. Why had he not thought of that before? He changed his tactics, and without being too cordial, graciously accepted the

guest's apologies and thanks for his hospitality; he even accepted the proffered hand.

"I tell you, dominie, this was quite a feast for me, after drinking the water of your swamps for weeks."

"You have still a few minutes to spare." Father Pietro glanced at the dial. "Bring some more wine, Peppina; some of the old muscatella. I'm beginning to feel faint myself. Now I will give you a drop that would bring a dead man back to life—to show there is no ill-feeling; I know how to separate the man from his office."

He smiled sweetly, and Egalité had had just enough wine to let the disparity of the priest's former and present attitude pass unnoticed. He took the smile, the words, at their face value.

Father Pietro, like himself, was a man of the world, and after getting over his chagrin at being bested by him, wished to be civil—perhaps Egalité thus explained to himself the old man's change of front.

"Hurry, Peppina!" Father Pietro called down the cellar.

Five more minutes said the dial.

"I am coming, Father Pietro." A few seconds later she came up, blew out the candle and put the decanter on the table.

"That's something worth drinking; I've had it in my cellar for years." He held the decanter up to the sun's rays; its contents sparkled like liquid gold.

Egalité took the proffered glass, raised it, and toasting the priest, "To my host," drained it to the last drop.

The dominie was right, it was worth drinking.

"Sapristi, this goes into the blood!" He laughed as he fell back in his chair, and he laughed still more when he tried to rise and could not.

The dominie laughed with him—and he had real cause for merriment. The large glass of heavy muscattella, of which he sometimes took a small liqueur glass after an unusually Lucullean meal, was slowly but surely doing its work.

"One more glass, Signor soldier."

"No, no, thank you, dominie, I've had quite enough. I need what little wits I have left. The horse ought to be here."

He rose with effort and consulted his watch.

"It will be here in a few moments, Signor," reassuringly said the man in the cassock, filling Egalité's glass and emptying his own on the ground.

"Here's to the Republic!" he toasted, raising his empty glass.

Egalité laughed.

"What are you trying to do to me, dominie? But I have to drink to that. May she live!" He drained the glass.

Trying to replace it on the table, he miscalculated the distance; the glass fell to the ground, and he in his attempt to catch it landed in the chair.

This time his attempt to rise proved futile.

The laugh died on Egalité's face; a gleam of intelligence told him he had gone into a trap. His hands and feet felt like lead—they refused to obey. The priest, the girl, the table, all danced about the yard like a merry-go-round, his ears buzzed as if a thousand bees were flying about them, his head threatened to burst, and the blood rushed through his body like liquid fire.

An uncontrollable desire to sleep came over him, but something within him kept on repeating: "You must not—you must not." The continuous strain of the last twenty-four hours, the lack of rest, the wine, all combined against him. The inner voice grew weaker and weaker. He finally was in that state of utter demoralization, in which one realizes in a semi-conscious way everything going on, without having the power of reasoning.

After a last strenuous attempt to rise, his head fell forward on his chest.

CHAPTER II

TEMPTATION.

Father Pietro raised Egalité's head. A pair of glassy eyes almost reasonless stared at him. Satisfied as to the safe condition of his victim, he went into the house to take the Contessa the news that the obstacles in her way were removed. He left Peppina to watch the soldier.

The dominie had hardly gone into the house when the man in the chair, spasmodically reanimated, made another attempt to rise. His groans of despair filled Peppina with pity. The handsome soldier had been so kind to her, and now he sat helpless in the chair. She looked up to the windows; no one was looking; she filled the decanter with water, and slowly poured it over his head. Cold water had always helped Caramelo. She washed his face, bathed his eyes, and soon a slight pressure of the hand told her of the efficaciousness of her cure. Presently he could get up; she led him to the well, and the constant stream of cold water on his head worked wonders.

Suddenly she became conscious of doing something contrary to the dominie's interests, and stopped, but a heartrending look of despair in the young man's eyes,

as the first gleam of intelligence came into his face, made her redouble her efforts. His whispered "thanks" caused a big lump to rise in her throat, and when he, without her assistance, was able to walk back to his chair, she could not help saying "thank God."

Meanwhile Father Pietro, with an agility no one would have given him credit for, taking two and three steps at a time, had ascended to the upper floor. On the landing he was met by Crispina, who hearing the steps, came out of his bedroom, and putting her finger to her lips motioned him to speak low.

He took the peasant woman to his study, and there she told him what had occurred to her mistress since the arrival of the French officer.

Francesca had insisted upon putting on the clothes sent up to her by Arullo, but when dressed, she felt too weak to go on. After taking some soup, she had fallen asleep, leaving an order to wake her as soon as the dominie saw fit to send her off.

Father Pietro looked thoughtful.

The time for her to depart was at hand, but the question was, would her condition allow it?

He went into the bedroom. Lying on the couch was Francesca, dressed in the picturesque rags of a bagpiper of Savoy. He looked at her: the pallor had given way to a mild rosy hue; he listened to her breathing, felt her pulse: its beats were regular, she had no fever. The room was stuffy; he opened the window to let in

the air. While he was still considering the advisability of waking her, he saw from the window the blacksmith coming up the hill without the horse. When in hailing distance, he called out: "Where is the horse, Tonio?"

"The horse is lame, dominie; but the Podesta will send up his in about twenty minutes."

Father Pietro was very much annoyed by this new delay.

"Ask him to hurry."

The blacksmith set off speedily toward the village.

The sound of voices woke Francesca. Rubbing her eyes she sat up.

"Is it time?"

"Contessa, do you really——"

"Yes, Father Pietro, I must go—you don't understand—the time will come when you will."

Crispina came in with a bowl. "Won't you take me with you, Contessina?"

"No, Crispina, I think I am perfectly safe with the mountebank. The money promised for bringing me back here is my safeguard. Ask him to come up."

"First take a little more of the soup; it will give you strength," begged the faithful old soul.

"Very well, give me some. What has become of the Frenchman, good Father?"

"He is taken care of."

Francesca was alarmed by the sinister expression of his face, and the priest hastened to add:

"Conte Alberto's muscatella has anchored him."

She gave a sigh of relief.

"Is the mountebank below?"

"He is."

"Then give me your soup, Crispina, and let me start."

Crispina gave her the broth, and after Francesca had partaken of some of it, the scaramouche and his spouse came up. He gave her some instructions, the woman put the last touches to her costume, and they started. They reached the yard, and found the Frenchman sitting on the chair, his arms resting on the table, his head between his hands, apparently oblivious to his surroundings. Peppina, conscience-stricken, was kneeling on the steps of the church consulting her patron saint whether she had done wrong or right.

Father Pietro went to the door to let them out, but finding it locked, remembered where he had to look for the key. He bent over the form on the chair. At his touch Egalité looked up.

The priest stood aghast and stared at him as if he were a spectre. The spectre rose and laid its hand on the dominie's shoulder, who did not dare move.

The young officer brought his face so close to Father Pietro's that the latter could hear the heaving of his chest. He tried to account for the change in the man and could not; the turn of affairs had so completely upset the worthy Father, that that ever active brain of his refused to work. He did not feel the hard pressure of

the hands on his shoulder—he was conscious of nothing but the two bloodshot eyes riveted on his face, and tried to gather strength for the outburst to come.

It did not come. Egalité's head was becoming clearer and his reason had returned. He released the priest.

"Your white hair and the garb you are wearing save you from the punishment you deserve!" he said. He gave him a last look of contempt and turned away from him, and his eyes lighted upon the trembling group at the door.

"Who's that?"

"Some mountebanks who begged for some food," the dominie explained falteringly, "would you mind opening the door for them, Signor soldier?"

Egalité gave the priest a look which brought beads of cold perspiration out on his forehead.

"Nobody leaves the premises until the horse comes!"

Egalité's legs shook. He steadied himself by the table, and walked to the group at the door for inspection.

The two mountebanks were too typical to arouse suspicion, but the boy—the delicate boy, who pulled the broad brim of his hat over his face, was worth investigation.

He got up close to get a good look at him. As he reached out to turn him around, the agile boy slipped away and made for the vestry door. Egalité gave chase and caught him by the arm before he reached it. It felt soft and round.

"Ventre St. Gris! This is a woman!"

The boy struggled, the priest who had rushed after them, hung his weight on Egalité, but the soldier hung on to the youngster, until a stinging pain in the hand forced him to relax his grip.

This allowed the boy to gain the vestry door.

Egalité shook off the priest, flung him to the ground, and rushed up the steps after the woman in disguise. Too late—she slammed the door in his face and locked it from the inside.

The priest had fallen with his head against the well and made no attempt to rise, and the two screaming women threw themselves on his prostrate form.

Arullo, with the assistance of Encarnacione, went over the wall and fled down the hill toward the village, howling "murder!"

All this happened in the briefest time.

Egalité became conscious of the pain in his hand, from which the blood was streaming freely. He walked to the well to wash the wound before bandaging it.

Someone knocked at the door.

"The horse is here, dominie."

That meant departure. He hesitated and looked at the vestry door. Who was the woman there?

At the sound of the voice outside, the two women had looked up and Egalité's eyes met Crispina's. She quickly lowered her face again, but the glance had sufficed; the face was familiar to him—it had awakened a memory of something—where had he seen it before?

The pain, the loss of blood, were completing the sobering-up process; he took another dose of cold water and walked around the well to get another look at the woman.

Link by link he began to connect the events. The old woman at the well—a young woman disguised in the vestry—the priest's attempt to detain him by an overdose of old wine—it was all clear to him now.

He straightened up. With head erect, his step firm, he walked to the vestry door; the old energy was again in his voice when he knocked at the door and called to the woman within: "Open the door! I know it is you, Contessa!"

Father Pietro had come to.

"How does he know—how did he find out?" he asked the women.

They did not know.

"He recognized you." The priest meant Crispina.
"Why did you show yourself?"

As no sign came from within, Captain Egalité repeated: "Open the door, Contessa, or I will blow off the lock!"

The dominie rose with the assistance of the two women.

"My curses upon you, ungodly Jacobin! if you desecrate the sanctuary."

Egalité did not deign to look at him. He listened at the door for a sound from the woman within—no answer.

"Don't force me to extreme measures! Everything within me revolts against the attitude I am compelled to take toward a woman—but I must do my duty! Submit to the inevitable—Diantre! then have your way!"

A flash of fire, the detonation of a shot—the old lock fell off and the door flew open.

Francesca appeared on the threshold. "What do you wish?"

"The dispatches you carry!"

"I have no dispatches!"

"Swear to that upon the cross, and you are free to go wherever you choose."

Francesca took a step back at the suggestion, and turned; raised her hand to the cross on the vestry door, as if she had made up her mind to do it; but as she faced the church her strength failed her, she leaned against the frame and her arm came down again.

"I must have them." His voice was soft and pleading. "My honor as a soldier, my oath of allegiance to the flag, forbid me to go from here without them. Mademoiselle, do not make me do something for which I would hate myself—yield!"

The girl on the steps was insensible to his pleadings, in fact to everything, except the one thing for which she was willing to make every sacrifice: "The honor of the family—the spotlessness of her escutcheon." A most determined "no" was her answer to his appeal.

"In the name of the French Republic, you are my prisoner, Mademoiselle, and I must search you."

He walked up the steps.

She pulled out the little poniard, the same with which she had cut his hand, and held it against her own breast.

"Move another step and I will kill myself!"

He halted, exasperated by her unfairness.

"Mademoiselle, you are fighting against windmills—your dispatches will not reach their destination while I live to prevent it, and to that end you shall remain here with me until they can do no harm."

He turned his back upon her, and sat down on the bench at the well, signifying that his mind was made up and discussion at an end.

Francesca was not easily discouraged; one weapon had lost its point, she tried another. Threats had been of no avail—she took refuge in tears.

"Ah, Monsieur, I beg of you—I implore you, let me pass. You are one of us. What are these Jacobins to you?"

"They are my brothers ——"

"You will be received with open arms in our ranks—glory and honor wait for you there!"

"I would gladly give my life for you, Mademoiselle, but not the lives of 15,000 of my countrymen."

This strong minded, wilful girl had never known what it meant to see a wish of hers unfulfilled,. Her father had adored her, her aunt Pamela and her cousin and

fiancé had been like wax in her hands. At court her great beauty had made slaves of the men; her purity and goodness, the unconsciousness of her power, made her beloved by the women. She had had her way in everything. For the first time she found herself balked. Vanity became a potent factor in this struggle. The thought of defeat was unbearable to this wildflower of the St. Angelos. Stamping her little foot, she sat down on the bench and looked at the man opposite, sitting with his back turned to her. Could nothing move him? Had she exhausted all her means? She flattered herself that she had aroused a more than common interest in him the evening before. Had she lost her beauty since the previous night? Unconsciously she looked into the well; the picture reflected in the water reassured her on that point—she was still beautiful. The words of some courtier, overheard against her will: "That woman is worth committing a crime for," came back to her. She shrank from her own wickedness—was it worth making such a hideous sacrifice, to win the game she was playing? Yes, yes, echoed within, anything to come out victorious in this struggle against the man whom she began to hate as only an Italian woman can hate! She was ready to play her trump card—her beauty.

"Monsieur—Monsieur ——"

He turned.

"Monsieur, I owe you a debt of gratitude—I owe you my life, what is more—my honor ——"

"You owe me nothing, Mademoiselle—I should have done the same for Peppina."

"Oh, but you can't make me believe you would have given Peppina the password."

This struck home—what was she aiming at? His suspense was not of long duration.

"Monsieur, let me pass—and I am yours—wait for my return here, and Father Pietro will join our hands on my return."

It was out—she watched for its effect.

He was on his feet in an instant—his face was all aglow at the suddenness of this unusual proposal.

She was not conscious of any breach of precedent; it was but another means to gain her end, and that was all she thought of just at that moment.

He did not go down on his knees—he did not open his arms to receive her—he asked her a simple question, the one she least expected: "Could you love a man who deserted his flag?"

"My eternal gratitude ——" she faltered.

He repeated the question: "I said, could you *love* him?"

Francesca evaded his eyes.

"No, you would hate him ——"

The dominie and the women had gone into the church. At Crispina's suggestion they rang the tocsin.

Francesca heard the peal of the bell, but Egalité heard nothing, saw nothing but the girl before him.

"Contessa, you are willing to make this sacrifice for your country, but you would despise the man who would sell his own—even were the price your beautiful self! You called me a renegade, because I threw ancestry, name, fortune and prejudice to the winds, to fight for France. For France I banish myself from the paradise you are holding out to me."

"The *King* is France!"

"The *nation* is the King—I am the nation's servant, and as such I must do my duty. What does the ringing of these bells mean?"

"It is the tocsin calling the peasants to arms!"

Led by Arullo, the mob had reached the vicarage, and a voice outside called: "Father Pietro! Father Pietro! Where are you?"

Father Pietro appeared in the doorway of the vestry.

"The Contessa and I are kept prisoners here, Podesta—surround the house, break down the door!"

These words brought forth a babel of voices: "Eviva la Contessa! Father Pietro! Get ladders! Scale the walls! We'll set you free! Who's in there? Get axes! Break down the door! Where's the blacksmith?"

"Surrender, Signor—resistance is useless!" the priest called to Egalité as soon as he could make himself heard.

"Now you are my prisoner!" came triumphantly from his temptress.

"This ends the dilemma. Contessa, you shall see the renegade knows how to die." Egalité fastened the

sabre to his wrist, cocked his pistols, and faced the door which shook under the mighty strokes of the blacksmith's hammer.

"The first man who enters, dies!" The hammering ceased.

"Why do you stop, cowards?"

"They forgot to make their wills, dominie!"

"Curse you all, if you do not take him! Break down the church door! Take him from all sides!"

They recommenced to hammer with redoubled energy.

Francesca tried to pass him to reach the door; Egalité blocked her way.

"Let me go!"

"Over my dead body!"

"Your actions are those of a madman!"

"What seems madness to you, is duty to me!"

"Surrender, and your life will be spared."

"The soldiers of the Republic die—they do not surrender!"

A head appeared above the wall. Egalité fired, and the man dropped.

The peasants saw the soldier was in earnest about selling his life as dearly as possible, and they went to work more cautiously.

A crash that shook the walls of the church was heard.

Egalité knew they had broken in the door—he turned to Francesca and smiled.

"They are coming; say a prayer for my soul, Contessa; my time is up!"

"For the last time, surrender."

He sadly shook his head.

She heard Father Pietro's voice inside the church.

"This way, my men. Contessa, where are you?"

"Here I am, Father Pietro."

Again she tried to pass him.

Egalité dropped the pistol with the empty barrel, threw his arm around her waist and carried her toward the house. With his back against the wall, he proposed to make his last stand. His "over my dead body" was no empty threat; he meant to carry it out to the letter.

Francesca struggled against his embrace; he begged her to remain quiet and stand behind him, as he did not wish to make a shield of her.

She gave in, and he removed his arm.

Leaning behind him against the wall, she awaited the issue.

Father Pietro came rushing out of the church. She did not trust her eyes—with him was Cesare and several villagers armed with axes, picks and scythes.

"At him, men!" commanded Cesare. This was his opportunity to redeem himself in the eyes of Francesca, and with the men at his back he made a fine showing.

"Stay where you are, if you love your lives!"

"At him—his pistol is not loaded."

The men rushed forward, Egalité fired and one fell.

This dampered the ardor of the others. They halted, looked at each other, and waited for someone to take the initiative.

This momentary hesitation on the part of the peasants was Egalité's salvation.

A voice from beyond the wall yelled terror-stricken:

"They are coming! The cavalry! The French! Run!"

A few musket shots, the blast of a bugle, the clatter of numerous hoofs—"hurrahs," mingled with the frenzied shouts of the flying peasants, and Egalité knew that help had come in the eleventh hour.

The peasants in the yard threw down their weapons and scurried out through the vestry. Over the wall the people in the yard could see the tops of the plumes of the French soldiers as they swept by, charging and dispersing Francesca's rescuers.

Deserted by his followers, Cesare's heroism was not of long duration. Dragging the priest with him, he sought the shelter of the house, and left his fiancée to take care of herself.

CHAPTER III

CAPTIVITY.

The noise and turmoil had subsided, and the vicarage within and without assumed its former aspect of peace.

Relieved from the stress and strain caused by the rapid succession of events, reaction set in, and the two young people in the courtyard, utterly unstrung, gave way to the demands of nature, and allowed their muscles and nerves to relax. Only the little fibres in the headquarters of the human organism kept on connecting—and as they are the power supreme, nothing could stop *their* working. Strange to say, the victor in the struggle felt no joy at his victory, the vanquished no sadness at her defeat.

Tired, worn out mentally and physically, Francesca apathetically sought the bench, to think over the remarkable course her life had taken since the night before.

Full of courage and determination, she had set out on this mission, to save the honor of the family name which was threatened with everlasting disgrace. For the first time she had tested her powers against the current of life, and after victory was almost ready to

fall into her lap like a ripe fruit, she found herself dashed to pieces against a rock in her course.

The rock was the man yonder. She had measured strength with him, and found hers wanting. He had conquered despite overwhelming odds. She tried to persuade herself that she hated him, but ever and anon, at the bottom of her soul, something kept creeping up that seemed treason to everything she had cherished heretofore.

What was it? It was not love? Not admiration for his steadfast courage? No—it was neither of these. He was a soldier, and she found it natural that he should stick to his post to the last and die in the fulfillment of his oath to the flag.

What was it, then?

He was a man. A man in the highest sense of the word. He had resisted a temptation which few would have been able to resist, and she *respected* him for it. She hardly liked to harbor that feeling for the man she had wantonly insulted, because his views had not fitted into her narrow horizon. He was an enemy of her country, an enemy of the institutions she had been taught to revere, an enemy of the existing order of the world, consecrated by the usage of thousands of years—nevertheless she had reluctantly to admit to herself that she respected him.

On second thought it came to her that her attitude toward him had been far less commendable than his

toward her. The remembrance of her words a short while ago brought the blush of shame to her cheeks. What if he had accepted the sacrifice, which she in her wilful obstinacy, in her spirit of recklessness was willing to make. What then ?

She knew he was not going to accept it ? No—this was a fallacy, she confessed to herself. She could not know, could not possibly know how great the temptation had been, and how hard he had struggled with himself before he conquered it.

She looked at him. He had sheathed his sword and was bathing the hand she had pierced with her poniard. Like John-a-dreams she stood there watching the red stream that trickled out of the wound as it mingled with the water, dyeing it first pink, then redder and redder until it became a dark puddle of blood.

He felt her glance resting upon him, and looked up. She raised her eyes and studied the dial above.

Taking his hand out of the water, he examined the wound; the poniard had pierced the palm through. An exclamation made him turn to the girl on the bench. He noticed an expression of pain on her face at the sight of the injury inflicted by her.

He smiled at her reassuringly—she lowered her head.

What was that ? Was it not a tear that stole down her cheek ? His heart beat so violently, he thought it would break through his ribs. Had she tempted him then, he would have succumbed. Dispatches, honor, duty,



"FOR THE LOVE OF GOD MADEMOISELLE GIVE ME THE DISPATCHES." — *Page 139.*

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revenge—all were forgotten. For them there was no past, no future—only the present. Once more their eyes met in a lasting glance—their souls had kissed.

The blast of a bugle broke the spell.

Egalité went to the door to unlock and unbolt it, and looked out on the road. Beyond the cemetery, he saw a squadron of hussars of his own regiment, among them his Lieutenant, returning from the pursuit of the peasants.

He remembered in a hazy way, how and where he had left him the night before, and wondered how he had got here.

Turning to his left, at the foot of the hill, just emerging from the village, came a cavalcade of twenty or more officers. Their uniforms and arms glittered in the sunlight. They offered a fine spectacle.

He shielded his eyes to distinguish their faces. The man at their head rode a white charger. Now they were near enough, and he recognized the General-in-chief. That inscrutable pale face brought the cause of his presence at the vicarage before him—the dispatches.

He turned his head and looked for the girl on the bench, who still had them in her possession. She must yield them to him, or he would have to give her up to the man on the white horse.

“For the love of God, Mademoiselle, give me the dispatches.”

The current of sympathy was broken by that one word.

They became enemies again, implacable, relentless enemies. What a world this is!

A "no" as determined as ever was her answer.

The General, seeing a hussar in the courtyard, checked his horse and called to him.

Egalité walked to the door and saluted.

Francesca, quickly gliding along the wall, followed. She stopped behind the open door, where she could hear what they were saying without being seen.

"Mort de ma vie, what does this mean?"

"The peasantry is in revolt, Citizen General."

"Make your report quickly!"

Egalité thought he noticed a glance of recognition in the General's eyes. He turned and spoke to a young officer back of him, whom Egalité remembered as the aide who had walked his horse about.

His hand burned like fire, he pulled himself together and made his report.

"Captain Egalité, in pursuit of a spy carrying dispatches from General Colli to General Beaulieu."

The mention of the two names went through the commander like a shock. He dug his spurs into the flanks of the charger, that reared and turned on his hind legs; this caused the other animals to follow suit, and for the next few minutes there was quite a commotion.

Egalité stepped back during the confusion, and Francesca, who divined what was coming, slipped the dispatches into the pocket of his dolman hanging before her, without her foe being aware of it.

The skillful horseman soon mastered the fiery steed, and the General could again give his attention to the officer.

"The dispatches," he asked curtly, reaching out for them.

"In the hands of the captive."

"Where is he?"

The General had to wait for some time before the Captain opened his lips to answer. Patience was not one of his strong points. He nervously tapped the tops of his boots with the crop in his hand while waiting. Thinking the Captain might not have heard him, he sharply repeated the question.

Egalité had borne arms, since he had grown to manhood; the first word he had been taught was "subordination." For the first time in his career he felt the terrible significance, the full meaning of this word. He bit his lips until they bled. Her salvation meant the ruin of France—the doom of thousands of his country men.

The struggle was short and terrible.

Loyalty to the flag won the victory.

He turned to point to the bench where he had last seen her. She had gone. Had she escaped? He felt a thrill of joy going through him. But no, as he turned back again he saw her trembling form behind the door—he saw her last appealing glance; it cut into his heart like a knife. He closed his eyes and turning to the General, pointed to the door. "There."

"Search him," came peremptorily from the man on horseback.

Some of the soldiers dismounted and took hold of her. A heavy mist fell over Egalité's eyes; he saluted in a perfunctory, mechanical way and stepped back.

He found himself next to Laporte and the troopers who had dismounted.

"By my pipe," said the old soldier, "we followed in your wake and got here in good time, Captain."

"Too soon for me."

The Lieutenant looked up. "A moment later they would have cut you to pieces!"

"I wish they had."

"By my pipe ——" He thought his Captain had gone mad.

"The *he* is a *she*!"

Egalité heard the words, the brutal laugh that followed them; it all seemed to come from some distance.

"A woman?" asked the General, greatly surprised.

"I don't think I am mistaken."

He saw her dragged to the man on the white horse. Her clothes were deranged, the hat had fallen off, the torn shirt revealed her white skin, reddened in places by contact with the rude hands of the troopers. Her hair had escaped its bondage, and she shiveringly covered her bare breast with the golden tresses.

"We can't find any papers on her. Shall we try again, Citizen General?"

Before they could lay hands on her, Egalité threw himself between them and the girl like a madman—his whole frame shook as he addressed the commander.

"I know the contents of the dispatches, Citizen General!"

The officers of the staff, as well as the troopers, did not know what to make of him, and they expected to see the General turn to reprimand the daring Captain who had addressed the man highest in command, without being spoken to.

General Buonaparte, however, was far too much interested in the fair captive to pay any attention to little breaches of discipline.

"Mort de ma vie, what a beauty!" he muttered, riveting his eyes on her face.

The aide behind him had to repeat Egalité's words before he could tear himself away to hear what the Captain had to say.

But the first words had hardly passed Egalité's lips when the General gave him his full attention.

"General Colli is coming up by forced marches ——"

"Mort de ma vie!—and the armistice?"

"A ruse to give General Colli time to come to General Beaulieu's assistance; his vanguard will reach the banks of the Adda the day after to-morrow, the 11th, and take our forces in the rear. Until then, General Beaulieu is to avoid battle."

The spurs once more dug into the flanks of the white

charger, which pawed the air with fore legs. The rider wheeled him around and shouted to the officer to his right:

"Berthier, give orders for a general advance toward the Adda."

His chief of staff gave the orders to his various aides, and they stormed away in all directions to inform the Generals of Division of their commander's decision.

The horse became uncontrollable, it tried to get away with the rest; but its master willed otherwise. He was not done with the beautiful young woman standing at the door of the vicarage.

With whip and spur he brought the fiery tempered animal about, until it stood stock-still, trembling in every limb.

He then rode close to Francesca, and bending until his face was nearly on a level with hers, he whispered: "Au revoir, my beauty, until to-night."

Tearing his eyes from her face, they alighted upon Egalité, who, staring before him, weakened by the loss of blood, could hardly raise his hand in salute.

"Captain, bring your fair prisoner to headquarters. Your head vouches for her. Ah, I see you are wounded; look to your hand before gangrene sets in. Take your Lieutenant with you."

Throwing his horse around until he faced the officers of his staff, General Buonaparte raised his riding-whip and pointed to the north.

“Messieurs, to-night we sleep in Lodi—in a week in Milan!”

There was a ring of triumph in his voice; down came the crop upon the horse's quarters, and on he sped—to new victories, new conquests.

CHAPTER IV.

WANDERINGS.

The man on the white charger and his staff had disappeared from view. The trio before the vicarage stood motionless and silent in the brilliant sunlight.

"What a General!" at length exclaimed Laporte, and proceeded to accentuate the sententious thought by filling his pipe. Then noticing that their shadows were growing shorter, he asked the captain whether it was not time to depart.

"Headquarters twenty miles away. Hadn't we better start?" Without waiting for an answer, the smoke-belching Lieutenant disappeared behind the wall.

Egalité turned to Francesca. He felt dejected and miserable, the hopeless, forlorn look in the girl's eyes added to his wretchedness. He would have given much to find some word of apology. Was it his fault? Had not her own obstinacy caused the brutal search? He could utter neither apology nor consolation.

There was that pain in his bosom which one feels when compelled to see a brave tender creature suffer. Partly she suffered through his agency; the more pain. No, he denied it; she had herself brought on her trouble.

Well, unfortunately, he sympathized with her; he felt for her. Her sorrow was his. No longer defiant, utterly helpless now, her face pathetically quivering—she was a figure to melt the hardest heart.

She had melted the heart of Mars; but not with pity. Her beauty, not her forlorn state, had attracted him. Buonaparte's emotions were trained to be commercial. He eschewed unremunerative sentiment.

"Mademoiselle—" commenced Egalité with a note of regret in his voice, as he drew closer to her.

She shrank from his approach.

The words died on his lips. He winced under her glance of scorn and contempt.

It was a relief to both when Laporte returned with the horses.

"By my pipe, Captain, I've got a powerful nag for you. Four years old and full of the devil. The girl had better ride the sorrel."

Francesca looked about the yard for Crispina and the priest. Neither was visible. The nurse and Peppina were prisoners in the belfry, where they had gone to ring the tocsin. The French hussars had laughingly taken away the ladder and left them there. The domine was discreetly sitting in his study, whither he had retreated at the reverse in affairs.

"For your own safety and convenience, Comtesse," said Egalité, "you had better ride in your present habit."

Her pale cheeks burned, first thinking of the masculine rags in which she was attired. Her hand flew to the throat of the red blouse; it needed buttoning. She adjusted her disheveled hair under the tight-fitting cap. The baggy trousers required a hitch.

Egalité looked the other way.

Laporte looked aside, but broadly grinned. "Sacre bleu! serve her right. If women must meddle with war, let them take a few of the consequences."

The trio mounted. The Savoy piper boy, nimble as the others, disdainfully refused assistance. Astride the sorrel, she made a very handsome and resolute young Savoyard; too haughty of chin and beautiful of feature to be really taken for a juggler's apprentice. She looked neither to right nor left, and sat very straight.

Off they rode at a swinging canter.

Father Pietro shortly before this had finished his reflections in his study. Behind a screen of flower pots at a front room window, he looked out and saw the countess and her captors go. He watched until they reached the crossroad below the village. They took the northern road to Pavia. This was all he wished to know.

Cesare had also surveyed the departure, from the garret window of the vicarage. He came down to join the dominie, but not until he had assured himself that the Frenchmen had really gone. At the staircase landing he found himself face to face with the priest.

"Conte Cesare! We must set out and follow the Contessa."

"Yes. I suppose she must be rescued."

"The Podesta will furnish us a couple of armed men; we must pursue instantly." The priest quickly donned a pair of riding boots and flung a heavy silver crucifix about his neck; besides this, deposited a secular weapon, double-barreled, in his pocket.

"Come, let us go!"

Cesare, rubbing his pale brow in profound thought, made no motion to stir.

"Why do you wait?" The energetic dominie was impatient.

"Father Pietro," quoth the Count, "what is the use of two armed men? The Captain and his Lieutenant would merely capture us."

"Well, then, the Podesta shall give us fifty!"

Cesare objected that fifty would be as useless as two. The French were swarming about those parts. Could fifty raw villagers, with scythes and clumsy guns, fight a battalion of disciplined Sans-culottes?

"The Contessa must be rescued!"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Leave everything to me. Has not Rome won more battles by craft than force? Even if we follow alone, we have a good chance of success. The French will not molest me, a priest; you will pass as my servant. Once we catch up with our friends, we will devise a stratagem of deliverance.'

"I will kill those two Frenchmen myself!" exclaimed Cesare in a heroic glow.

"You will soon have the chance. Come."

"W-e-l-l, is this—" he rubbed his pale forehead—"the best course after all? Is it—the safest plan?"

The priest looked at him contemptuously. He said with withering sarcasm:

"There is greatest safety in sitting at home!"

"Oh, don't misunderstand me, Father Pietro!" hastily replied the other. "Would I not die for my dear Francesca? Would I not perish to rescue her from the hands of those French savages. Yes! the Conte St. Angelo is brave by lineage and by nature;—every risk——"

Shrill screams coming from the steeple interrupted his ebullitions.

"My God! What is that?" The nobleman's face became a shade paler, if that were possible.

"Go out and see, Signor Conte, while I collect some money and look for some papers."

The screams rose louder. The Count did not offer to investigate. If a lurking Sans-culotte were committing a deed of violence on some peasant, why involve himself?

The priest went forth and shortly returned.

"What was it, Father Pietro?"

"Bah! the two women squealing to be let out of the belfry—Peppina and the Contessa's servant."

Cesare, much relieved, was struck by a bright thought.

"Let us send the gypsy and these two women after the fugitives!"

It was quite a habit of his to send women on his own errands.

"And what for?" said the priest indignantly.

"Why, they can all pass for mountebanks; no one will molest them! When they have located the night's stopping place of those they are pursuing, they will return and tell us. Then, if it happens to be an isolated inn or the like, we can quickly advance."

"Conte, are you sure you want to rescue your fiancée at all?"

"Zounds! Do you dare impugn my courage! Am I not an officer in the Piedmontese army? Am I not a nobleman?"

"At the Theresianum you certainly studied the heroic careers of all historical personages."

"Therefore I am courageous myself! By lineage, nature and education!"

Not having seen much of him since he went to Vienna and later joined the army, the priest imagined his noble pupil had outgrown his boyish mode and was become quite a stalwart fellow, in speech and deed. Of course, from the moment he saw Cesare, with a mob at his back, leading such a faint-hearted attack on the lone French Captain, the opinion was reversed.

Now thoroughly disgusted, and angry at the loss of precious time, the dominie cut the argument short by exclaiming:

"You need not go with me if you prefer personal security! I will go alone! By the way, if there should be any battle in this vicinity, and the shells begin to fly, you'd better get into the cellar."

The priest walked out of the house.

Cesare stood a moment, blushing very slightly at the scathing rebuke. Then suddenly he lifted a theatrical hand to an apostolic daub on the wall, and the dominie, as he walked away, heard him exclaim:

"Francesca, your champion knight, your deliverer comes!" He followed the dominie.

At the village there was no difficulty in finding horses, but it took some of the priest's best persuasion and promise of a large golden reward to induce a couple of peasants to accompany them. They set off on the road to Pavia, three quarters of an hour behind the objects of their pursuit.

Cesare was afraid they would catch up.

"If we do, you and our two men will attend to one of the Frenchmen; I will take care of the other."

The ecclesiastic was now more filled with the fighting spirit than concerns of the other world.

War draws everything and everybody into its vortex. Priests, women, old men, rich and poor, even the children.

It was the past and the future—night and dawn that were fighting for supremacy all over Europe! The pale-faced, eagle-eyed little man, the Man of Destiny was the agent of a universal purpose.

A few miles from Binasco, the road turning by a forest, they heard the approaching clatter of a cavalry troop.

The peasant escort put its head together. They checked their horses.

The dominie looked at them, not liking their actions.

"Here, Giacomo, Paolo—what do you mean? There is no danger, if you'll keep your mouths shut and let me do the talking."

At this moment the scarlet coats of the hussars, their flashing accoutrements and imposing headgear, swept into view.

John and Paul did not stand upon the self given order of their going, but went; turning their horses with marvelous quickness and putting spurs to them without mercy.

Seeing two horsemen fleeing, some of the French cavalry pursued; they fired a few shots. Luckily our peasants scuttled into the forest, with which they were well acquainted and where they were safe from pursuit.

Cesare would have been happy to follow their example, but he was not quite quick enough, the priest seizing his bridle.

"Would you ruin all? Fool!"

The Captain of the troop halted his men.

"Dominie, what's your business on this road? who were those runaways?"

"Signor Captain," quoth Father Pietro in a tone of

melancholy benevolence, "I do not know who those poor peasants may be; they joined us a few miles back. The ignorant are timid. As for myself, I am on my way to administer extreme unction to two French soldiers."

Father Pietro never forgot this stroke of inspired wit. He used to say it was the best thing that ever came into his head. In the retelling, at the words "extreme unction" he would quite appropriately finger a pistol whose muzzle stuck out of his pocket.

"Sacré!" said the French officer, "two of our men? How were they injured?"

"I have not the details *yet*." The "yet" was another point in the story.

"And this is your servant?" Cesare at that moment was frightened enough to look the part.

"Yes, Signor."

"Well, you're an exception for an Italian priest. Go ahead and administer your unction. When you get through with our poor comrades, I think we'll have a bigger job ready for you at Lodi. *Dominie, farewell!*"

The hussars dashed on in a cloud of dust.

After this adventure, Cesare declared it was madness for them to proceed. They were fortunate to escape once; the next time they would surely be arrested.

"The Sans-culottes will find we are deceiving them and take us for spies. We'll be shot like dogs!"

"My dear Conte, you are ready to die for your fiancée—you said so."

"Assuredly—to save her. But I am not willing to die for no object. I am a prudent man."

The dominie spurred on without a word.

"See here, Father Pietro," continued Cesare, catching up to him, "what harm can befall her? They know she is a woman, and the Contessa di St. Angelo. She will be treated like a distinguished prisoner of war. Why, curse it! I wish I were in her boots myself."

"You are right, the French are honorable and gallant, she will doubtless be soon released on her parole."

"Then we turn back?" said Cesare eagerly.

"No!" shouted the priest. He had been merely carrying out the flimsy argument of cowardice in mockery. "The Contessa Francesca was my pupil. I received many benefits from her father. When he died I swore to myself to be a guardian friend toward his daughter. Now the time has come when I can perhaps repay some obligations and fulfill my vow. A priest I am, but also Francesca's friend and a man. Come! a little resolution, persistence and bravery—and she shall be rescued!"

Cesare's reception of Father Pietro's glowing enthusiasm was like the definition of how some men take in knowledge—"like a sponge, which gives its water all out again, only a little dirtier."

The country side was in sad turmoil far and near. Muffled sounds of musketry came from one side and another. From an eminence one could have seen the glittering arms of cavalry and of infantry, who, in large

bodies and small, were pouring northward toward the banks of the Adda. Burning farmhouses dotted the landscape with perpendicular columns of smoke. Yonder was a whole village afire. Echoes of drums, the faint blare of distant bugles, were borne through the parched, brilliant atmosphere.

As the indefatigable dominie took his unwilling companion farther into the heart of the war territory, the latter painfully realized that it would be impossible to turn back now. French soldiers were behind them as well as in front; they were on all sides. He could only stick to the mad priest and devoutly hope for the best.

They were on the verge of another meeting with the Sans-culottes. A detachment of infantry, moving almost at the double quick, came their way.

The dominie decided to avoid an interview for this occasion. He and Cesare temporarily retired into a forest bypath.

After some hours of brisk traveling, they got news of the party of their quest.

"Yes, Father," said the withered beldame, hostess of a little wayside inn, "two Frenchmen and a Savoyard boy. They stopped here for refreshment and rest. The boy was quite worn out;—I wondered much to see——"

"Yes, yes, how long ago? They went straight on?"

"I couldn't imagine what connection the ragged——"

"Here is money. Tell me their direction, quick!"

"Signor Padre is liberal. They left fifteen minutes ago. From the top of the hill you will probably see them."

Without a word the pursuers spurred to the hilltop. The white road stretched away undeviatingly for several miles.

No traveler on that road!

Father Pietro cursed and went back to the beldame for explanations.

During all this time the French officers and their disguised prisoner had jogged on from Binasco without the least exchange of speech. Laporte finally tried to get into a little conversation with his Captain; but Egalité's grunts and curt responses discouraged him. Thereafter he talked to his horse in the exclamatory style, or studied the scenery on either hand.

The two men rode on the right and left sides of the rocky highway; the Savoyard kept in the middle.

Francesca had always been an expert horsewoman. As a girl she had thought it great sport to ride in the masculine manner. As she galloped thus over the foothills of the Alps, the villagers would come to their doors and say, "Ah, what a girl!" and feel a thrill of pride that such a brave young Countess would one day demand their allegiance.

Her riding abilities were now not thrown away, but this was another kind of frolic that the daughter of the St. Angelos was perforce engaged in. She was now a

captive, clothed in a disgraceful garb; in the hands of a man whom she strangely dreaded.

Every now and then her blood boiled with indignation, and she was on the point of hurling bitter reproaches at Egalité's head.

Why had he allowed the brutal smirking soldiers to search her? Why had he denounced her to the General?

She answered the questions herself—rather to the exoneration of the Captain. His bandaged hand reminded her of one incident. She reflected he had kept strictly within his duty. Had he not responded to her temptation with remarkable honor?

Convinced against her will, she was of the same angry opinion still.

At least Egalité was no gentleman!

No, she knew this was false. He did belong to that category; his qualities demanded respect. Therefore she felt the more vexed and irritated.

When one is dealing with a ruffian, one has at least no mental conflict to decide how to behave towards him. Persons whom we partly approve, cause us sore annoyance.

Egalité noticed that her horse's girth was loosened.

They halted: he could not very well perform the service himself, on account of the wounded hand, but told Laporte to do so.

The Savoyard scornfully waived assistance and tightened the girth with her own hands.

On they rode through the hot sun. The dust began to rise in a bad stretch of road.

As their pace slackened beside the forest, Egalité saw the exertion of the journey telling on her, and experienced a boundless compassion.

He edged up to her. She swerved her horse aside.

"Ah, she hates me!" muttered the Captain to himself.

Laporte gruffly hummed, in the wrong key, the revolutionary ditty "Ça Ira."

A troop of hussars coming from behind caught up with them.

"Captain Egalité, well met!" hailed the jovial leader, "you're certainly going in the right direction. There is fighting around Lodi, sure as sin."

"Sorry, comrade, my assignment takes me elsewhere."

"What, a prisoner?"

"Yes, to headquarters."

"Ha, ha! sorry for you, comrade. Forward, trot!"

"Luck to you fellows!" roared Laporte to the departing troopers. "I'd give a leg to join you! They've blanketed us with a damned nasty trifling business!"

"Captain," quoth Laporte shortly after, "I do believe there's a fight ahead. By my pipe, I'm aching for a scrimmage; I haven't smelled burnt gunpowder for an age."

"You're an old fool. You'll get chances enough to die."

"I won't take any chances—of being left alive. By my pipe, we're no camp followers; our place isn't with the baggage! Look here, if we push our nags top speed we can get to headquarters in two hours, and then take our share of the fun."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Diantre, Laporte! Have you no eyes?" The Lieutenant hadn't. He understood when the Savoyard coldly exclaimed:

"You needn't trouble about me!"

"Nevertheless I will," rejoined Egalité.

Francesca whipped up her mount, broke into a canter and set the pace. The Captain bit his lips and followed. At the wayside inn the commander of the party ordered a halt, despite the grumbles of the Lieutenant.

"Hostess, bring us some food and wine."

Laporte cheered up and pitched into all the beldame produced. The Savoyard refused everything except a glass of water dipped from the oaken well bucket. This she obtained herself.

Egalité neither ate nor drank. He busied himself rubbing down the sweating steeds; finally allowing them a little water.

Again in the saddle, they rode over the hill. How they came to disappear from their close pursuers' ken so suddenly, happened in this wise:

At the bottom of the hill, half a mile from its sum-

mit, a narrow road branched off to the right. A French straggler sat on a fallen tree.

"Whither bound, comrades?"

"To headquarters."

"Headquarters have been removed to Lodi. Take this road and you save three miles."

"By my pipe, Captain, three miles are worth saving."

"Are you sure?" Egalité distrusted stray advice.

"Confound my soul! I've just come this way; yesterday I took the main road."

They turned into the branch road just before Cesare and the priest reached the top of the hill.

Those ill-assorted pursuers berated the beldame of the inn. Without waiting for the explanation that would have put them on the right track, they resumed the straight highway. Coming to the side road, however, Father Pietro remembered it.

"It is clear, they have gone this way!"

The road led through the forest; it was dark and forbidding; almost a cattle path.

"The devil!" said Cesare. "There's a nice place to get ambushed in! I've had about enough!"

The priest forced the timorous nobleman to ride on ahead of him.

Francesca and her captors continued their way. The Lieutenant, in better humor after having thoroughly refreshed himself, made the woods ring with his ponderous 'Ça Ira.'

After travelling for half an hour they overtook a peddler's wagon. The driver, an old graybeard Hebrew, jumped down and prostrated himself before them.

"Spare my life, honorable soldiers, and take what you like!"

"Diantre, have you found the French soldiers inclined to murder and pillage?"

"No, no—of course not, Excellency!"

"Who are you, whence do you come, and whither are you bound?"

The cringing Hebrew declared he was Giuseppe Veronica, a traveling dry goods merchant, and he——"

"Dry goods? Let me see your stock!"

Laporte protested "Blast it, Captain, if you want a shirt, I have an extra clean one in my blanket roll. We're losing time."

Egalité had an idea and knew what he was about.

"No, I don't want to see all that stuff." The peddler brightened up. "Have you got anything in the way of women's clothes—a dress?"

The Hebrew had. A good part of his army trade consisted in articles of feminine use and ornament, where-with the gay soldier cemented the bonds of his amorous friendships. He showed several cheap muslin gowns.

Laporte, standing behind a tree, gave vent to suppressed chuckles. The Savoyard took absolutely no interest in the proceedings, meditatively flicking off the eaves from an adjacent bush with the whip.

"I see," palavered the merchant, "Signor wants something uncommonly fine. The lady is beautiful. Well, then, here is a costume fit for a princess."

A green riding habit was pulled out and thrown on the embarrassed arm of Egalité.

Studying the gown for a moment, he glanced at the figure of the uninterested Savoyard. "Yes, I think that will do."

Now, by a marvelous coincidence not likely to be repeated in the history of mankind purchasing clothes for womankind, this green riding habit was destined to fit Francesca perfectly—for the reason that it had once been her own property. Crispina, some weeks previously, had disposed of it to the wandering Jew.

At the time the Countess was not aware of the facts; and if she vexedly appreciated the Captain's delicate thoughtfulness, she did not realize just how successful he had been. The grateful Guiseppe was well compensated in French gold. Egalité added the green costume to his blanket roll, and they rode on.

Lieutenant Laporte occasionally burst into a raucous hee-haw that frightened the squirrels and sent the pheasants whirring from the covers. Since he merely laughed, and carefully abstained from personal allusion, there was no legal ground for him calling him to account.

The next adventure was a rather serious accident.

Crossing a log bridge over a little creek, the Savoyard's mount stumbled and fell. The rider was extricated un-

hurt. The luckless sorrel was found to have broken its right foreleg. There was no help for it; it was necessary to shoot the poor beast.

"By my pipe, here's a pickle! Damn these time-saving short cuts, say I! Captain, if there's any fighting at the front to-day, we're out of it, that's flat."

The conflict of Lodi was raging at its height just then. The roaring of the cannon could be faintly heard in the forest.

"Mademoiselle, you will take my horse."

The Savoyard did not seem inclined to obey.

"Prisoner, you will take my horse."

She obeyed. Egalité walked alongside. He refused to exchange places with the Lieutenant.

The sun began to throw long shadows. In the forest it was almost twilight. The party could proceed only at a slow pace.

A noise of hoofs in their rear. They dismounted, and drew back into a thicket to examine the number and nature of those approaching. They were two horsemen, briskly traveling. Not until they were nearly opposite did Egalité recognize them, the priest and Cesare!

The idea that these persons were pursuing them struck him as so comical that he was behind Laporte in conceiving the practical uses of the situation. That sagacious warrior bellowed:

"Halt! Your horse or your life!"

In his nervous fright, Cesare's spurred heels involun-

tarily dug into his steed's flanks; otherwise he would certainly have obeyed the fearful summons. Father Pietro also shot into a gallop.

Thus they escaped, fortune averting from them the indignant bullets sped by Laporte.

"By my pipe, Captain, why didn't you shoot?"

"Diantre, why didn't you hit?"

The rest of the forest journey was marked by no interesting events, but was very tedious and disagreeable. Night fell. The moon had not risen. The darkness was impenetrable. They lost the cattle path several times and spent long quarter hours in regaining it. The falling dew made the air chilly. Egalité took off his pelisse and ordered the Savoyard to wear it. She broke a long silence by declaring she would not do that, but would don the green riding habit.

In the boudoir of night Francesca donned her once discarded gown, over her Savoyard costume.

No one rode now; the horses were carefully led. Laporte grumbled and swore.

Various plans for getting out of the labyrinth were discussed. The best seemed to be to push ahead as well as they could. Egalité thrice climbed trees in the hope of discovering a way out. He only saw far distant and faint illuminations on the horizon in several directions. The evening star was momentarily a sad disappointment. It looked like the beacon of a hilltop dwelling.

"If we were alone," grumbled the Lieutenant, "we'd camp out here till morning."

Francesca finally had to confess she was exhausted.

Egalité, touched to the heart, decreed a stop of three quarters of an hour. There was monosyllabic conversation. Voices of nocturnal creatures sounded about them in confused harmony.

The Lieutenant smoked his pipe in taciturn ill-humour.

When they continued the groping march, the night was far advanced. Very likely the cattle path had branches, and they had wandered into one or more of these. At last when, not long after, they emerged rejoicing from the sepulchral forest, they saw the lights of a town not more than a mile away, and a little farther a stream which glistened in the rays of the moon that had emerged from behind the cloud, and which Egalité conjectured was the Adda.

"Then the lights yonder must be the lights of Lodi."

Laporte heaved a sigh of relief, they were at last near their destination.

Francesca shivered—the Captain noticed it and started on a trot in order to get his charge under cover.

CHAPTER V.

"SHE LOVES ME!"

Manuele, the inn-keeper, had just returned to his hostelry. His good wife met him at the door, exclaiming:

"At last—oh, I was so worried about you! I heard shooting in the direction of Lodi all day; it only stopped when night came."

"Yes, Annunziata," he responded, kissing her, "there was terrible fighting at the bridge of Lodi. Thousands of Austrians against a handful of French."

A noise of hoofs and voices outside.

Manuele slammed the door, the wife extinguished the candle.

"Diavolo—who can it be ?—sht!——"

"Ho, there, inn-keeper!"

Manuele whispered in exultation: "It is a Frenchman—they are retreating—some stragglers!"

"Didn't you hear ?—mountain rat!" shouted Laporte.

"Go a house farther—I want to go to bed."

"Open—or it will be your deathbed!"

"Away, braggart—you don't frighten me," was the doughty rejoinder of mine host.

Laporte thundered his pipe oath.

"No harm shall come to you, good people," came the milder tones of Egalité. "We have a woman with us; she can't camp in the road. We must have shelter."

After a little further parley, the inn-keeper, swearing by Bacchus' body that his was a dog's life, opened the door; and the wandering trio entered.

There was a grateful heat in the tavern; the embers in the large fireplace cast a cheerful glow.

"Where can we stretch our tired bones for a few hours?" quoth the leader of the party.

"Corpori Bacco, you won't have much time to stretch," said the inn-keeper, "since the Austrians will be here soon."

Francesca, wonderfully refreshed by such intelligence, made a motion of joy.

"The Austrians?" exclaimed Egalité and his Lieutenant in a breath.

"Yes—there was fighting at Lodi bridge—the French were beaten—the Adda is red with their blood."

Egalité seized his arm. "Tell us all you know!"

"They tried to cross the bridge, but the Austrians mowed them down like hay—I was within a mile of the bridge this noon."

Manuele rubbed his hands as if he had imparted the choicest news.

"Hadn't we better push on?" grumbled in undertones Laporte.

"I don't trust that man," responded Egalite, "I'll investigate Lodi—you take the road to Villanova."

"And the prisoner?"

"She'll give her parole and we'll leave her here."

"Parole?—I don't trust her out of my sight! The inn-keeper has a horse—she goes with us!"

Egalité indignantly pointed to Francesca, who had just staggered into a chair. "Don't you see the poor girl is tired out?"

"That poor girl will cost you your head."

"What do you mean?" frowned the other.

"I'm not blind! I know you're crazy in love with her; she knows it and will turn it to good account at the first chance. Beware!"

"Beware yourself, Lieutenant, lest you exhaust my patience!" Egalité retorted with official coldness. "Mount your horse, ride toward Villanova, and report to me when you return—I'm responsible for the prisoner."

"Captain, I'll ——"

"You'll obey my orders!"

Laporte swallowed his wrath, saluted stiffly, and departed, not without a half audible: "Damn the woman!"

Egalité turned to Francesca, who sat pale and enervated. "You must be worn out. I should like to let you retire and have a good night's rest, but I can only do that on your promise that you won't attempt to escape."

"Shall I be absolutely delivered from your presence if I give my word?" she asked icily.

"Yes."

"Very well, I give you my word. I will make no attempt at flight until to-morrow morning."

"Thank you, Contessa." Then going to the inn-keeper he asked: "Have you a room with a bed, padrone?"

"Yes, Signor soldier."

"Get it ready for the lady."

Manuele and his wife bustled off to carry out his orders.

Egalité discoursed in the general direction of Francesca:

"I have to ascertain how much truth there is in the padrone's story of our defeat. I hope he lied, and that I won't have to disturb your sleep. Good-night."

No answer.

"Good-night." No answer; and Egalité went forth with a sigh.

Annunziata returned and informed the lady that the room was ready.

Francesca roused herself. "Thank you. Host, have the French really been repulsed?"

"Undoubtedly, Signorina! There were only a handful of them, and thousands of Austrians."

She took out a purse. Mine host's eyes glistened.

"Try to find out which side was victorious, and wake

me when you return. This will be your reward—good-night."

After she had gone to her room, Manuele ejaculated:

"I wonder who she is?"

"He called her Contessa."

"Well, I'll try to earn that fat purse. Lock the front door, good wife, and blow out the lights. I'll go out the back way—across the fields."

"But the two French soldiers?"

"Per Bacco, they won't bother us any more. They got frightened when I told them the Austrians were coming."

A quick knocking at the back door startled them.

"For God's sake, open—we are nearly dead with hunger and fatigue!"

These pathetic words, quite unlike the peremptory challenge of the earlier arrivals, came from the agitated lips of Count Cesare, who, with Father Pietro, after much wandering about the country, chanced thus to hit upon the same hostelry that sheltered his captive fiancée.

After being shot at in the forest road, Cesare had known nothing but terrors. The whole country seemed to be full of brigands, soldiers and assassins. He frequently declared he would not proceed another rod, but the priest had kept him going.

"Who's there?" said Manuele.

"Two countrymen—fugitives from the French!" responded Father Pietro.

Reassured by the sound Italian accent of the priest, the tavern keeper opened the door, saying:

"Come in. There's always a place at the fire and a mouthful to eat in my house for countrymen in distress."

By the light of the candle held up by Annunziata, Manuele saw how travel-stained and weary the newcomers were.

Father Pietro made the motion of blessing over Manuele's head, and sank into a chair.

"Where do you come from, good Father?"

"From Binasco."

"A prosperous little village."

"Binasco is no more, my son—the villains have burned it to the ground—as we saw by the flames in the southern sky."

Cesare wearily interrupted with a demand for food.

The inn-keeper started for the kitchen. "I suppose you know there was a great battle at Lodi which lasted till night?"

"We heard the cannonading—which side was victorious?" The priest leaned forward in his chair, anxiously scanning the host's features.

"The Austrians, as far as I know. I was near the bridge this noon. The French tried to cross the Adda four times, but were driven back."

Manuele suggested that if it were made worth his while, he would ascertain the news accurately

Cesare gave him some money.

"A lady arrived here a little while ago," pursued the landlord. "She too seemed much interested."

"A lady? Describe her!" said Father Pietro.

"She didn't look very happy—she came with two French soldiers—one called her Contessa."

"It is she!" exclaimed the priest. "Where is she?"

"In there." Manuele indicated with his thumb.

"Where are the two French soldiers?" inquired the prudent Cesare, holding on to the priest.

"They got frightened when I told them the French were beaten—ran off, leaving the lady."

"Francesca, we have rescued you!" ejaculated Cesare, smiting his manly chest.

The inn-keeper's wife rapped at the door of the side chamber.

Francesca, whom nervous excitement had prevented from sleeping, opened the door immediately. Seeing the priest, she exclaimed:

"Father Pietro!—this is a sad meeting."

Cesare stretched out his hand, crying:

"Ah, Francesca!—Mia Francesca!"

His words brought forth no echo of delight, she did not heed him, but turned to the inn-keeper.

"Have you not started yet?"

"Let us go with him—he knows the road. If the Austrians have won, we will meet them before daybreak," said the priest.

Cesare approved.

"I should not have thought you," said Francesca scornfully, "would be so anxious to meet the Austrians."

"Why not, pray?" He tossed his head jauntily.

"Think—Cesare di Monza ——"

The priest interposed. "The minutes are precious. Come, my daughter."

Francesca shook her head.

"I can't go with you, Father; I have given my word to Captain Egalité to attempt no flight until to-morrow morning."

"You gave it under pressure." The priest was a graduate of the sacred college at Rome.

"Bah! a word given to a canaille of a Jacobin doesn't count," quoth Cesare.

Francesca proclaimed sharply: "A word given by a St. Angelo is as good as an oath!—no matter to whom given." She turned to the priest.

"Are you sure the Austrians will be here before morning?"

"Our host says so. But why wait until morning? Supposing it is a mistake, and the French come instead of the Austrians—what then?"

"You heard me, Father. I cannot." She sat down with resolute lips.

Cesare struck his chest with his left hand. "Francesca! I have come—we have come to rescue you! We have followed your captors all day and part of the night. What? I command you to go with us!"

"Command? You? By what right?" There was ringing contempt in her tone. She had risen.

"As your affianced husband!"

"You are that no longer!" She walked close to him. Her eyes blazed. The priest uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Let me tell you, Father, it was *he* who was ordered by his General to carry the dispatches—at the first indication of danger he shrank, and allowed *me*, a woman, to pass into the night, and go through an army of soldiers intoxicated with wine and victory! The moment I crossed the threshold of Castle St. Angelo last night, I tore the name of Cesare St. Angelo out of my heart." Turning fiercely to him: "The blood of those who have been killed through your cowardice be upon your head!"

"Daughter, daughter!" groaned the priest, "I don't know you any more."

"That may be, Father—I admit the Francesca of last night and the Francesca who stands here, are two different persons. I have learned a great many things which you never taught me. Among others, that a piece of parchment does not make a *nobleman*, and that a noble *man* may fight under the tricolor and still remain a *nobleman*."

"Curse those foreigners who have poisoned your pure soul!"

"They have enlightened me, Father Pietro, and I now look on the world through my own eyes."

"Poor misguided child! Have you thought of your fate in the hands of an insolent overbearing foe? Do you know the meaning of the gleam in the eyes of the young General as he looked upon you?"

Francesca, struck by the words and tone of the speaker, stood half dazed for a moment and made no reply.

There was silence.

It was broken by the voice of Egalité singing in the distance outside. "What is life without love?" went the burden of his song.

"The Frenchman is coming back," said the inn-keeper.

Francesca had temporarily regained her composure.

"No matter what comes, my Father—I must pursue my way."

"Maledetto," hissed Cesare, "you seem to be in love with that Jacobin!"

"He may be a Jacobin, Cesare—but he's a *man*!"

Egalité's voice was heard speaking to his horse.

"Ah, the brigand!—the Sans-culotte!—I'll settle my accounts with him." Cesare fumbled at his belt.

"There's your opportunity." She pointed to the door.

"Not now!" He slunk toward the kitchen exit.

She laughed scornfully. He darted towards her as if to strike her.

Father Pietro restrained him. Retreating with Cesare, the old man cried:

"Shame upon you, you perverted daughter of Italy! Come, my son—leave her to her fate and the despoiler of our country; he will avenge you!"

The priest's wrath melted at the moment of going. He stopped at the door and made an appealing gesture to the girl who had once been his pupil and obedient child in the church. Francesca dismissed him with a wave of the hand. Bowed down with despair, he followed Cesare and the inn-keeper.

A troubled look came into Francesca's eyes, as she repeated to herself the phrase of Father Pietro: "Do you know the meaning of the gleam in the eyes of the young General as he looked upon you?"

One sometimes receives a suggestion that instantly convinces; an explanation that sheds immediate light. Her dazed mind had drawn no conclusion from the meeting at the vicarage; now that the idea was presented, it found a fearful acceptance. She shuddered.

"Ah, horrible!"

What was she to do? Agitated with bodeful emotion, she sat down on the chair and wept. The melodious voice from without came again—like a ray of sunshine. She went quickly to the front door and unbolted it. Her mind was made up.

"Captain Egalité!"

"Yes."

"Will you come in, please?"

"As soon as I finish rubbing down my horse. I thought you had retired."

"I can find no rest. I must speak to you this instant."

He appeared in the doorway, looking surprised.

"What can I do for you, Mademoiselle?"

"I wish you to release me from my parole."

"Impossible! Why this sudden change of mind?"

"I give you fair warning, be on your guard; I'll attempt to escape on the first opportunity."

Egalité laughed. "I understand. You credit mine host's story of an Austrian victory."

"Did he tell the truth?"

"I don't know. My poor beast gave out; I had to come back without any information. The Lieutenant will be here soon."

Francesca drew close to him. "I beg of you—I implore you, let me depart."

"You don't know what you are asking—calm yourself. You are upset and have exaggerated fears."

"What does your commander-in-chief intend to do with me?" came hesitatingly from her lips.

Egalité, not understanding, replied briskly: "He will allow you to go in peace, as soon as he knows your dispatches can do no harm. The Republic does not make war upon women."

"Supposing I were your sister, would you, with a quiet conscience, deliver me into your commander's hands?"

Egalité was not unacquainted with some sinister tales regarding his young General's exploits in another field than that of war, but had paid small attention to them and had given them slight credence.

The terrible suggestion sank into his mind also. Frag-

ments of confirmatory evidence rapidly pieced themselves together. He was the quicker to entertain the hateful suspicion, because she was concerned whom his heart was set upon.

Nevertheless, he tried to reassure himself and dismissed the suggestion with a wave of his hand.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, your mind runs riot!"

"You have not answered my question."

His eyes sought the ground.

"Captain Egalité, let me depart!"

"My honor is at stake."

"And you are willing to sacrifice mine?"

"Mademoiselle!"

"Take pity on me—I could have broken my word and flown. I admit this morning you had to do your duty, you could not let me go. I had dispatches which, if delivered, would have done great harm to your country;—now the die is cast, the battle has been fought, and it is not a question of Italy or France—it is a poor girl pleading for her honor."

She knelt with uplifted hands.

Egalité caught her up. Duty and love trembled in the balance.

"Where are those dispatches?" he asked in a low, broken voice.

With a tearful smile, she put her hand in the pocket of his pelisse and drew out the Austrian packet.

"You placed them there?"

"Yes—at the vicarage. I'll burn them before your eyes." She walked to the fireplace and tossed the envelope amid the gleaming embers.

They silently watched the papers burn to ashes.

"Now, Mademoiselle, swear not to mention the dispatches or their contents to a living soul."

She gave the oath.

"Get ready. I'll saddle the inn-keeper's horse."

Francesca, in an hysterical outburst of joy, rushed toward him. She stopped and said falteringly:

"Captain, what will be your fate if you arrive at headquarters without me?"

Laporte, who meanwhile had appeared on the threshold, answered the question with startling emphasis:

"He will be court-martialed and shot! His head vouches for you!"

The Lieutenant sternly eyed the pair.

Francesca wrung her hands despairingly. Then suddenly she controlled herself and said with quiet dignity: "I have no right to accept the sacrifice of your life." She turned away.

"I am a soldier, Comtessa," uttered Egalité with proud, sincere fervor, "and as such accustomed to hold my life in the hollow of my hand; the bullet which spared me to-day may strike me down to-morrow. I could not give up my life in a worthier cause."

She looked at the stalwart brave officer with glistening eyes. In tender intonation she replied:

"I thank you with all my heart, Monsieur de la Tour—I'll put my trust in God. He will not forsake me." She rose. "Will you permit me to retire?"

Laporte interposed his bulky form. "If you wish to lie down, you'll have to do it here where I can keep my eyes on you."

"Ventre St. Gris!" ejaculated Egalité, half drawing his sword.

Francesca stepped between them. "Don't quarrel with him, Monsieur de la Tour. He thinks he is doing his duty."

The Captain replaced his weapon and drew the expostulating Laporte outside the tavern, where they continued their altercation. They were half visible at the front door. The face of mine host appeared at the side window. "Signorina ——" in a cautious whisper.

"What news?"

"The best! The Austrians are coming—hundreds of them—we saw them from the hill. Il Conte and the dominie set out to meet them. They'll be here in less than two hours."

"Are you sure you have made no mistake?"

"I take my oath—I saw their white coats in the moonlight."

Egalité's voice, risen to an angry pitch, reached her ears.

"I tell you she shall ride where she will!" Laporte's gruff response was unintelligible.

"Ah, don't go, unless they drag you away from here!" whispered the inn-keeper.

Francesca thought of a solution that would save her and Egalité also. If she waited till the Austrians came, the Captain would be taken prisoner: he would avoid court-martial, she would escape the French General.

"But what excuse can I make for remaining?"

"Per Bacco! Faint—say you can't ride." He bobbed his head back as Egalité entered the room. She deftly threw Manuele the promised purse.

Francesca took a limping step and gave a little shriek.

"You are in pain, Mademoiselle?" Egalité assisted her to a bench.

"No—it will pass—my ankle is a little sore where the stirrup pressed."

"Won't you allow me to pull off your boot? It will relieve the pain." He knelt before her.

Laporte entering, scowled hideously.

"Oh, don't trouble ——" She drew back at the suggestion of physical contact.

"I'll call the woman—but first let me make you comfortable; the bench is rather hard." He took off his pelisse and made a pillow of it. "So—is that better?"

She nodded. "Monsieur de la Tour ——"

"Yes."

"I have done you a wrong."

"Not that I know of."

"You do know, I have insulted you to your face and

in my mind. I was a foolish girl. I know better now. A man who fights honorably for his convictions, who sacrifices his life for their ultimate triumph, ought to command our respect, whether he be friend or foe. Can you forgive me?"

Egalité kissed her hand. "I'll call the woman."

Then going to Laporte who was sulkily filling his pipe at the fireplace: "Lieutenant, you said you ascertained nothing?"

"No—I rode about three leagues on the road to Villanova without meeting a soul."

"I don't know what to think," muttered Egalité. "If the French were retreating, you ought to have met some of our stragglers."

Laporte jerked an indignant thumb.

"Captain, if that little red devil hasn't bewitched you! let us mount and go on our way."

"No! It would be inhuman to force her to ride through the night—she's been in the saddle all day—besides, we don't know which way to turn. At all events, if the French have been beaten we will probably be taken. Let us wait and see what the morning brings."

"She's only shamming," spluttered Laporte, "to keep us here till the white-coats come! I'm not hankering for an Austrian prison!"

"Very well—ride on, I'll stay behind."

Laporte fumed and swore by his pipe. Finally he muttered: "I guess I'll have to stick by the Captain."

Meanwhile Annunziata was essaying to remove the boot from the Contessa's supposedly injured foot. Egalité had gone after a blanket.

Laporte looked on with abstracted interest. Francesca made a shy movement.

"Oh, you needn't mind him, Signorina—he's an old man!" The burly Lieutenant turned his back with a grimace. Annunziata dispatched him to the well after a bucket of water.

"Let me alone, good woman. My foot is all right."

"Well!" quoth the simple good-wife, desisting.

Egalité entered with his coat torn; a blanket on his arm. He made a solicitous inquiry.

"She can't pull off my boot—it hurts me so. What's happened to your coat? Let me mend it! A needle and thread, good woman."

"Allow me to take her place, Mademoiselle—I'll try to be more gentle. Now, ready—one—two—three ——" The boot came off in Egalité's hands, its fair owner delivering a musical little shriek. "Some water, hostess!"

"Hot or cold?"

"Cold," said Francesca.

"Hot, boiling hot!" quoth the absent minded Captain. He patted the dainty stockinged member.

"The poor little foot!"

"Monsieur de la Tour!" said she reprovingly, and withdrew her foot.

While the water was heating, he sat beside her, and she proceeded to mend his coat.

"Suppose the Austrians came now—would you fight?"

"I'd have to."

"But they'd kill you."

"Then I'd die at your feet. Poor little foot!"

"But you must not die. I don't want you to die!"

"Contessa," he said, taking her hands and covering them with kisses, "these words will ring in my ears through the roar of cannon—I will hear them in the din of battle—they shall be all I remember when I go to make my last report." Another shower of kisses rained on her hands.

"Monsieur de la Tour! How can I mend your coat?"

"Mademoiselle, can you mend my heart?"

This was asking leading questions; she refrained from answering.

"Really you must not fight!" she exclaimed after a pause in her industrious sewing. "You must allow yourself to be taken prisoner. You'll give your parole—and come to Castle Pionetto beyond the banks of the Adda. It is beautiful there now, everything in full bloom; and there we will hold you with chains of roses until the war is over. Perhaps—some day ——"

"Yes?" eagerly.

"Some day you'll see how wrong you were to fight for the men who killed your king!"

"Never, Mademoiselle! I'm a hopeless Sans-culotte! I drank it in with my mother's milk."

She pricked him with the needle. "That is the punishment." He winced humorously.

"Are you like your mother?"

"Sometimes, when I am at my best."

"Do you think she would be pleased if she knew you were fighting in the ranks of the Sans-culottes?"

"She believed in the doctrines of Maitre Jean Jacques."

"Who's he?"

A mischievous smile crept into his face. "I'll read you some of Rousseau's works some day—when we shall meet in peace at Castle Pionetto, and I'll wager you will become a worse Sans-culotte than I am!"

This time she dug the needle deep into his arm. "That's the punishment for saying such wicked things."

Laporte reappeared, grumbling that he had been on a fool's errand; there was no well. Annunziata came with a kettle of warm water, which she poured into a bucket.

Egalité said he would make a "little nest" for the patient. "Where's the blanket?—ah, there—now get me a couple of chairs, Lieutenant."

"What the devil are you trying to make of me? A sick nurse for aristocratic waifs?" He fetched the chairs, nevertheless. "Confound it, we can make as many revolutions as we like ——"

"Stop your growling, Lieutenant!"

"Sick nurse for aristocratic waifs!" snorted Laporte, though still assisting in the construction of the "nest."

Egalité rapped on one of the chair walls of the blanket chamber.

"We'll be at the door if you need us, Mademoiselle. Come, Lieutenant."

Annunziata took off the stocking, the foot was introduced into the bucket. A shriek reached the two soldiers.

They advanced simultaneously.

"What the devil is it now?" blurted one.

"Does it hurt so much?" gently interrogated the other.

"The water is hot, I scalded my foot."

"Ah, the poor little foot!" Egalité was quite distressed.

"The poor little foot!" mocked Laporte in disgust.

The Captain drew nearer the little "nest," and Francesca whispered: "Get rid of your Lieutenant."

Laporte scented something wrong, and wouldn't be gotten rid of; he refused to make another search for the well.

"Captain," said that downright son of Mars, "I've had enough of this playing at blindman's buff! Tell me what your intentions are in plain words!"

Egalité took him aside.

"In plain words, I intend to let Mademoiselle go where she pleases—as soon as she's able to set out."

"With her dispatches?"

"She burned them before my eyes."

"Damn it! Are you such a fool that you can't see that the General has set his cap for her?"

"You've hit the nail on the head—that's why he shall never see her again!"

"By my pipe, they'll cook up a charge of high treason against us!"

"I'll exonerate *you* from all blame."

"H'm—huh —" Laporte scowled. "Captain, I'll be equally frank. I'm not in love with the woman—and if she goes, she goes over my dead body!"

"Then she will go over your dead body," calmly responded the other.

The Lieutenant, with bursting indignation, put his hand on his sword. "Why the devil don't you fight it out now, and be done with it?"

"There may be an easier way out of it than killing you," explained Egalité. "Once within the Austrian lines, she is safe from him ——"

"And you'll go to prison?"

"No. I'll fight till they kill me."

Laporte philosophized heavily. "Women, women—you devils! All the world's trouble comes through you!"

To see his comrade thus led away under foul enchantment of Cupid, was the bitterest experience Laporte had hitherto known. No hen grieved more sincerely on seeing her duckling foster children take to water.

Francesca had been anxiously watching the half-audible conversation.

"Captain Egalité—Citizen Lieutenant, may I say a few words in private to Monsieur de la Tour?"

"Mademoiselle," proclaimed Laporte, "you are my prisoner—and so is the Captain! I can't permit any private conversation between you two!"

"Diantre," replied Egalité amused, "I'm your prisoner, eh? I'm glad to know that!"

"Do you understand German, Lieutenant?" asked Francesca, brightly, after a moment.

"Thank God, no!" responded the unsuspecting Laporte.

"You, Captain?"

"A little."

She took up the parable joyfully. "Besteigen Sie ihr Pferd und reiten Sie so schnell Sie können; die Oestreicher sind im Anmarsch."

"What's that jargon?" mumbled Laporte.

"Diantre, Lieutenant! Mount, and ride as fast as your horse can carry you—the Austrians are coming!"

"The deuce they are!" He was on the lookout for ruses.

At this juncture the inn-keeper rushed in:

"They are coming!"

"The Austrians?" exclaimed all in one breath.

"No—the French General with his staff!"

Laporte ran to the door and looked down the road which was lighted by straggling beams of the moon.

"Here is our chance," whispered Egalité, and he

quickly carried Francesca to the side window, which he noiselessly opened.

"But Monsieur ——"

"No hesitation now!"

"It means your life!"

"Nonsense, I can easily escape. You must not fall into his hands."

He placed her outside the window. "Inn-keeper, go with her—you know the hills. God bless and protect you!"

He fervently kissed her hand and took a step back to close the window.

Two soft arms were thrown around his neck—a pair of warm lips sought and found his in a long kiss. He felt another heart beat against his own and closed his eyes overwhelmed by sweet anguish. When he opened them again—she had disappeared in the wood across the path. He hardly trusted his senses, and longingly stretched out his arms towards the woods which were sheltering her.

"Francesca! Francesca!" he cried in a frenzy of delight. "She loves me! She loves me! She loves me!" he kept on repeating to himself until the noise of many horsehoofs, clanking of arms, jingling of accoutrements, and the strident quick voice of General Buonaparte: "A place for my officers to lie down for a few hours?" brought him back to earth.

"There's a big hayloft," he heard the hostess say.

"Well, Messieurs, then up to the hayloft! Sleep on fresh hay instead of your well-earned laurels. I'll call you at daybreak."

"By my pipe," ejaculated Laporte on re-entering, "that doesn't sound like retreat! Ha—where's the girl?"

"She loves me, she loves me, she loves me!" In exuberance of bliss Egalité almost embraced his Lieutenant.

Filled with mingled consternation and rage, Laporte pointed to the open window. "You let her go?"

"Yes, that's the way she went!" exultantly replied the Captain.

Laporte drew his sword and rushed upon Egalité, whose own weapon merrily flashed out to meet him.

Laporte attacked like a despairing baresark, Egalité warding him off like a cat at play with her young.

"Good, but too low—she loves me!"

"How do you like this one?"

"Better! She loves me! Now look out, my old trick!"

The old trick punctually followed, and Laporte's sabre went flying across the room.

"Damnation!" howled the Lieutenant.

The hostess threw open the door—General Buonaparte stood on the threshold.

CHAPTER VI.

"THE SONG OF THE SWORD."

"Who's there? What's the commotion?" came the sharp vibrant tones of the General as he peered searchingly into the dimly lighted room.

The two soldiers leaped to attention.

"Captain Egalité of the Seventh."

"Lieutenant Laporte."

"Ah!" exclaimed the victor of Lodi with flashing eyes, advancing a step. "Where's your fair prisoner?" It was his first thought and first question.

"Gone," replied Egalité.

A murmur of curious surprise from the officers of the staff, who had crowded in after the commander.

"She's gone?" burst out the interrogator. "Your head vouches for her!"

"I am first a man—then a soldier," was the calm, dignified reply of Egalité.

"What do you mean?" cried Buonaparte furiously. The little red blemishes on his pallid face stood out prominently.

"The lady trusted in my honor, Citizen General."

"Your honor is to carry out the orders of your superior officer! A soldier knows no other honor!"

Rapidly walking back and forth, this consummate actor seemed unable to hide his chagrin.

"You aided her escape? What! The escape of a spy?" He emphasized the word "spy" for the benefit of his staff officers who were interested listeners.

"I did," came calmly from Egalité's lips. His eyes did not flinch. He stood at the most perfect attention, as immovable as a wooden image.

"Where were you while this happened, Lieutenant?" began the harsh voiced commander, turning to Laporte.

Poor devil, he saw himself already standing with his back against a wall, facing a platoon.

"He is blameless," interrupted Egalité.

"How long since—the escape?"

"Just before you arrived, Citizen General," answered Laporte.

"Lieutenant, take twenty men, search for her in the woods." Laporte, saluting, departed. Turning to Egalité, the General hissed into his face, "Mort de ma vie, I'll have you court-martialed!"

The intonation of these words, and their accompanying gesture of menace, made it seem as though he were executing the death sentence of the court-martial with his own hands.

General Buonaparte surpassed other men in a great many things, including terrible wrath. Once his anger

was aroused he was relentless as the fates. Few could sustain unmoved his furious gaze, which heralded the extreme penalty.

Egalité was one of the few whose eyes quailed not; but probably his mind was elsewhere. He had resolved on his course, he knew what to expect, the tempest of passion passed before him as if it were an Alpine storm surveyed through a telescope.

This was their third meeting in little more than twenty-four hours. Egalité recalled his meditations, his forebodings of the night before. The inner voice had spoken the truth. "Ah, fate!" he said to himself, and dismissed the subject.

"Captain Elliott!" called the General, after a long scrutiny of the young *ci-devant's* face.

"Citizen General?" The aide saluted.

"Tell the bugler to give the alarm!" The officer went out.

General Buonaparte followed him—at the door he stopped and turned back to Egalité.

"Captain Egalité, your sword."

Unsheathing his blade, Egalité broke it over his knee and flung the pieces at the commander's feet.

"I have drawn it for freedom, and the glory of the Republic!"

The Corsican's pale face became livid at the insult; he threw caution to the winds, made a contemptuous gesture as if blowing a feather off his hand. "That for your Republic!"

The action was so quick, the words so low, that scarcely any spectator saw or heard, or hearing understood.

With another change of mood he thundered: "I'll have you shot for this!" and strode out of the room.

Among those who tarried at the door was the truculent bully Sergeant Rastiboulois, whose smarts at the treatment administered to him by Egalité, at Castle St. Angelo, thirty-six hours before, now bid fair to be healed.

"I expected nothing else from the damned aristocrat!" quoth Rastiboulois in grim elation, addressing himself to Barsac the Corporal. The latter shrugged his shoulders and turned away—he had his opinion about Rastiboulois as well as about the Captain.

Outside the shrill notes of a bugle sounding the assembly was heard; weapons clanked, hoofs stamped; a solitary burst of laughter, the whinny of a horse; finally the loudly conversing soldiers and officers began to stream into the inn. They exchanged such phrases as—"Court-martial—no, I don't know who,"—"Yes, a traitor,"—"Who is it?"—"Sacré, wish they'd wait till morning,"—" 'Twill soon be over."

Meanwhile Annunziata, much frightened, had entered the room and awefully addressed Egalité.

"Santa Madonna! What is it now, Signor? Are they going to set the house afire?"

"Calm yourself, good woman, your four walls are

safe—but the foundation of the Republic is beginning to shake.”

“Death to the traitor!” arose a cry without. He recognized the voice; the bitter smile gave way to one of happiness as he was seized by a thought. He scrutinized the woman’s face—she looked honest and trustworthy and he spoke to her without further hesitation.

“My good woman, will you do me a great service? Will you carry a message for me?”

“To whom, Signor?”

“To the Contessa di St. Angelo—your husband will tell you where to find her.”

“Ah, the lady who came with you to-night——”

“Yes, she is gone—give her this”—it was a medallion—“and tell her that Captain Egalité died with a message of love for Francesca on his lips.” He also handed the woman a gold piece. “Take this for your trouble. Remember you are fulfilling a dying man’s request.”

“I shall do as you wish, Signor,” said the trembling hostess, concealing medallion and coin in her bosom. “Thank you.”

The entire staff of General Buonaparte, he among them, had meantime assembled in the dingy high-raftered apartment. Besides the staff, ranking from Colonel down, were a number of private soldiers, who in those days of fraternity and equality were competent to participate in a court-martial. The French drumhead court-martial at that time was a swiftly irregular engine

of justice. It wasted no time, and troubled not about forms, being as quick and thorough in its operation as the later Vigilant Committee of the new world. Some years afterward the Imperial code laid down rules and regulations for court-martial, as for everything else.

Captain Bevallon, the stern-chinned president of the court, spied Annunziata.

"Leave the room, woman—come back, and bring us half a dozen candles."

Speedily the taproom was changed into a court of justice. A table was placed on the left of the door, behind it a bench—for the judges. The Color Sergeant planted the staff with its tricolor in front of it. Between two candles on the table were a seal of the Republic, the code of the law, an inkstand, large sheets of paper.

The presiding officer seated himself at the centre of the bench; on his right and left hand sat his fellow judges—the trooper Hulin, and Sergeant Rastiboulois. Two other functionaries, designated as auditor and registrar, occupied chairs alongside.

By virtue of the numerous candles and the blazing up of the fire, upon which a heap of fagots had been cast, the tavern chamber became almost brilliantly illuminated. The military garments and accoutrements did not have the dress parade aspect; but their soiled, blood-specked, gunpowder-blackened condition was more appropriate to the affair in hand, and made a

scene of sombre splendor. It could now be seen how tattered and torn the tricolor had emerged from Lodi battle: the light revealed the grimy features of stern grizzled warriors, the beardless tense faces of ambitious young soldiers: pale and flushed, handsome and ugly visages; here and there a hand, arm, or neck bandaged. Dusty boots, rent clothes, sabred faces, they chatted together with a rude aplomb, intensely interested in the approaching court-martial. Only one man's life hung in the scales, whereas lately they had witnessed many snuffed out in battle, but this one was dear to all of them. In low tones they discussed the snatches of information gathered outside.

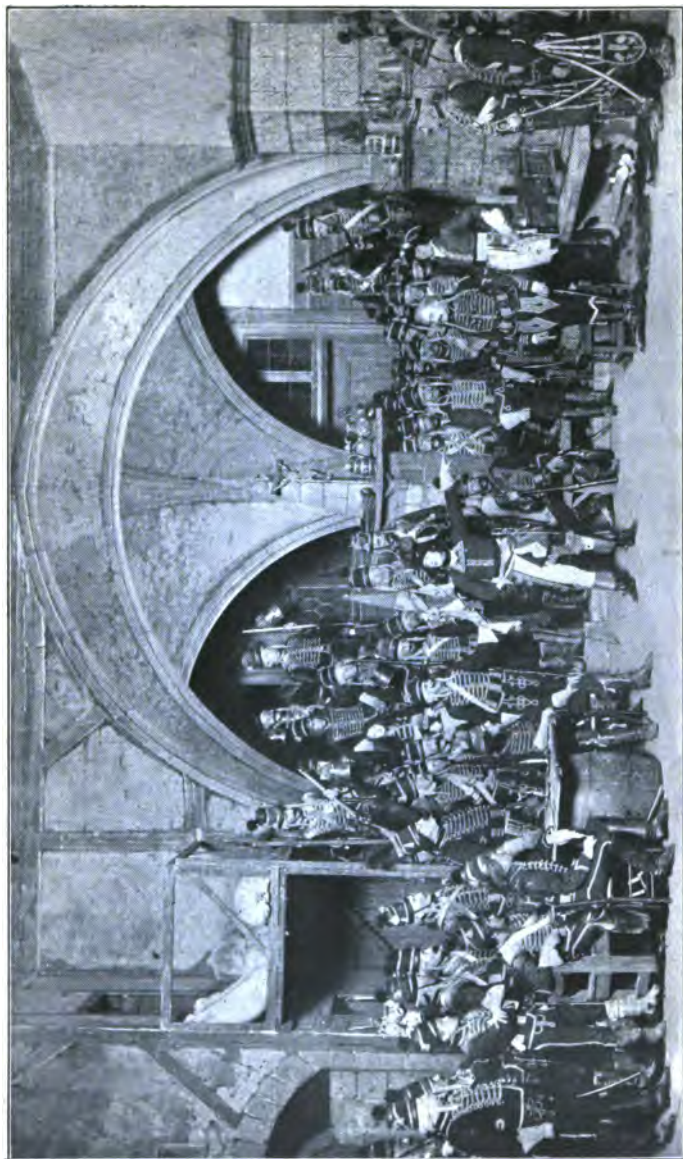
"Silence!" shouted the registrar, as all was ready. The conversation instantly ceased.

Buonaparte stepped forward from his background station beyond the fire.

Captain Bevallon, a tall fine looking officer of the Seventh, rose. His eyes sought the Corsican who stood near the fireplace.

"Citizen General, the court-martial is constituted."

The eagle-eyed pallid little commander came forward and facing the men constituting the court-martial stopped in the centre of the room; his chest thrown out, his hands behind his back; not a muscle of his face moving, unblinking before the garish light that fell upon it. Authority, tremendous will power, announced itself in the very pose. His appearance fascinated every



"I ACCUSE CAPTAIN EGALITÉ OF HIGH TREASON."—Page 199.

spectator. Forgotten were his shabby uniform, his small stature, the unglorifying stains of battle and march. He looked notable in every respect.

"Court-martial," snapped out the General in a tone perfectly articulate though so rapid, in a voice nasal, yet sonorous, "I accuse Captain Egalité of the Seventh Regiment, surnamed The Terrible—*ci-devant* Marquis de la Tour d'Auvergne—of high treason and conspiracy against the Republic. He has aided and abetted the escape of a spy carrying dispatches for the Austrian Commander."

A hum of resentment coming from Barsac's corner was rapped down by the president of the court.

The quick, incisive nasal voice resumed with a shade of more sonority.

"The law is immutable. A judge is more, or less, a man. He is less than a man because he has no heart. He is more than a man because he holds the sword of justice." He paused and let his eyes wander from Bevalon to Rastiboulois, and from Rastiboulois to Hulin. What he read in the latter's face hardly pleased him. His eyes flashed, but the trooper was unaware of it—*his* eyes were riveted upon the face of the accused who stood calm and serene. Had it not been for the empty scabbard, no one would have taken him for the defendant, charged with the most heinous crime a military man can be charged with.

"Proceed!" ejaculated the General with a sweeping gesture, which included all five men at the table.

The future world-conqueror strode abruptly to his obscure place in a corner of the room.

"Accused, stand up. What is your name?"

Egalité faced the tricolor and calmly gave the same names and titles used in the indictment.

The president of the court put the questions: the registrar recorded question and answer.

The drop of a pin could have been heard in this room filled to suffocation.

"You are Captain in the Seventh Regiment?"

"I have that honor." His attitude and voice were calm, yet not defiant.

"You have the right to choose a defender."

"I will defend myself."

"What have you to say against the accusation of high treason against the Republic?"

Slowly, with quiet grandeur, came the response: "I fought for the Republic at Valmy, Jemappe, Fleurans and Watigny, and on the third of September, '91, I saved four regiments for the Republic."

A murmur of approval rose. There were comrades among the assemblage who had fought by his side.

"Silence!" The bayonet-gavel rapped. "Your deeds at Valmy, Jemappe, Fleurans and elsewhere will live in the records of the Regiment—but what have you to say against the accusation of aiding the escape of a spy?"

"May I ask one question before answering?"

"You may."

"Who won the day?"

The president of the court looked at him, and shortly replied:

"We've crossed the bridge at Lodi. The Austrians are in full retreat toward the Po."

"Long live the Republic!" exclaimed Egalité in sincere exultation, throwing his hand in the air.

The beloved slogan aroused a noisy demonstration of sympathy.

"Silence! What have you to say to the charge of high treason?"

"The dispatches will not reach their destination."

"How do you know?"

"They were burned before my eyes."

"What was your reason for letting the prisoner escape?"

A pause ensued. Every gaze was riveted upon the prisoner. He answered steadily:

"The prisoner was the woman I love."

An ambiguous murmur from the spectators; they shuffled their feet.

"Ah, it was a woman," went on Captain Bevallion in a little softer tone. "Had you not strict orders to bring your prisoner to headquarters?"

"Yes."

Buonaparte, emerging from his corner, arms still tight behind his back, interjected, sharp and loud, "His head vouched for her!"

"Why did you act contrary to the orders you had received?" continued the head of the court-martial.

Egalité faced the commander-in-chief, and said: "The General will answer that question for me."

The General did not, but turned aside with a suspicion of a sneer—he kicked the logs in the fireplace so that the sparks flew.

"The dispatches might have benefited us," said Captain Bevallon, "if we had been able to learn their contents."

"At Binasco I gave the information contained in the dispatches to the general-in-chief: he acted upon it and won the day."

"Had you read them before they were burned?"

"No."

"Then how do you know you were not deceived by the woman?"

Egalité hesitated a moment, struck by the presiding officer's argument—his heart beat faster, but only for a second. He closed his eyes, and conjured up the pale face with the golden halo, and dismissed all doubts with a single gesture. "No—not she!"

"You have great faith in her; let me know who she is, and we may be able to share it."

Buonaparte was leaning forward with hawk-like eye on Egalité, who fearlessly returned his glances. As Egalité answered the last question with "I can't disclose her name," he took up the cross-examination with strident emphasis:

"Cut short and come to the point! Had you orders to bring her to headquarters? Yes or no?"

"Yes."

"Did you aid her to escape? Did you act contrary to your orders?"

"Yes."

"Was she the bearer of dispatches for General Beaulieu?"

"Yes. But she had burned them before my eyes—upon my word as a man and a soldier!"

A friendly murmur from the troopers in the background made it obvious to the General that the defendant was gaining ground—he strove to end the scene, and to reach his climax.

"We don't doubt your word," he snapped, "but this court has to deal with facts. Can you prove that the dispatches contained nothing but what you claim they did?"

"I cannot," admitted the prisoner.

Buonaparte quickly walked back to his corner, as if tersely to say, "It is all over. The case is clear. Verdict!"

"Have you said all you can say in your defense?" asked the president of the court, shrugging his shoulders.

"I have." Egalité brushed back a lock of hair from his temple. "I wish to add, that under the same circumstances I'd again act the same way!" He sat down.

The audience was not unaffected by the dauntless words. The bayonet-gavel was required.

Captain Bevallon whispered briefly to his associates. Rising he uttered:

"Auditor, what sayeth the law?" The auditor took up the code. "All rise and listen to the law!"

Descending from their window perches, leaving their supports of chair or wall, every soldier in the room straightened up and listened to the impressive reading.

"Edict of the National Convention of the Second Brumaire of the year One. The Republic one and indivisible decrees: 'He who gives aid or succor to, or hides an enemy of the Republic, shall be punished by death.'"

The auditor read in a slow monotonous voice. After he had finished, they were all aware of the solemnity of the occasion. The scratching of the registrar's pen could be heard in every corner of the spacious room.

The tired soldiers resumed their seats and resting places. Some sat upon the floor. It had been a long hard day.

"I shall now put it to vote," announced the president. "The sentence will be given according to majority. The first judge will give his verdict. Sergeant Rastiboulois, speak."

He rose and leaned forward to fasten his eyes upon the accused—slowly and vindictively the words dropped from his lips:

"For gratification of personal feelings, regardless of the fate of the army, Captain Egalité, ci-devant Marquis de la Tour d'Auvergne, has endangered the fate of the Republic." Again he tried to stare his former Captain out of countenance, who looked at him with calm indifference. "I vote for death!" he shouted viciously and wrathfully, banging the table with his fist.

A subdued a—a—h!

"Registrar, write—Sergeant Rastiboulois votes for death.—Second judge, Private Hulin, speak."

"Comrades," spoke Hulin, with solemnity and emotion, as he rose, "I belonged to the club of the pikemen who did away with the Bastille——"

The men in the background murmured their approval—down came the bayonet-gavel.

"Your vote!"

"I was among the patriots who brought Louis Capet back to Paris when he tried to escape——"

The crowd began to shout. The atmosphere in the room became stifling.

"Your vote!" repeated the president.

"I saw Captain Egalité," went on the other with rising voice, "shoot Malin when he shouted 'Long live the King'—I don't believe he's a traitor—and I'm damned if I wouldn't do what he did for the girl I love!" The last words were shouted.

Excitement had risen to fever heat during Hulin's speech. The climax of this plain simple soldier's ora-

tory struck a chord in the breast of every gallant spectator. There were cries of "Good!" "He's right!" "By God, so would I!" The majority were now solidly with the prisoner.

Egalité himself leaped up, exclaiming, "Brave Hulin!"

The gavel came down at least a dozen times, ere Captain Bevallon could restore order.

"Silence! Respect the dignity of the court!" When the noise had somewhat subsided, he sternly commanded, "Private Hulin, your vote!"

"Acquittal!" shouted Hulin and fell back in his seat.

It was a tie thus far, and the deciding vote lay with the president of the court.

Captain Bevallon was at sea—of course it was a clear case of breach of discipline, but he divined there was something underneath, that had not come out at the trial. He looked up and his eyes met the sinister eyes of the commander-in-chief. He knew he had to judge the case on its merits—as presented to the court-martial. With his head bent, his eyes riveted upon the code on the table, he gave his verdict.

"Violated discipline demands an example. Through an emotion of pity—or love, the accused has endangered the fate of the Republic. Therefore I vote—death." The silence was intense. After a pause he added: "The sentence will be executed at sunrise."

Buonaparte had gained his point, and without seeming to be the real engineer of the proceedings.

The one least affected by the verdict was the prisoner. He had fully expected it; he had calmly bargained for the mortal penalty; the kiss of Francesca was his compensation.

"The court is dissolved," announced Captain Bevalon, looking away from the doomed man.

Those unacquainted with Egalité had no further interest to expend; they hastened out to obtain much needed sleep. His friends, of which there were not a few, lingered some moments. Half a dozen of them sorrowfully shook his hand.

His dauntless bearing had excited the most affectionate admiration and deepest sympathy.

Hulin quite broke down.

"Captain—" he faltered with tears in his eyes and could not go on.

Egalité returned the squeeze of his hand, but made a mild attempt at gayety. "Tush, comrade, you discredit me. One does not enlist to live; even out of the army one does not live forever. I have one advantage now—I know I won't suffer from the bad marksmanship of the enemy. All the same, thanks for your vote."

At this moment Lieutenant Laporte returned with two of his men to ask how much farther the vain search for the escaped woman should be carried.

Hearing what had happened, the big-hearted if gruff-mannered fellow was struck dumb with sorrow. He walked up to Egalité with unsteady steps.

"Don't swear by your pipe, my dear Laporte. I know how you feel. I appreciate it."

Laporte silently wrung his hand.

"Lieutenant, if we meet in another Republic and engage together in the wars, I'll try to quarrel with you less."

"God bless you, Captain, we never quarreled!" almost blubbered the massive Sans-culotte.

The General beckoned to Laporte to make his report.

"No trace of her yet?" he said in a low tone.

"Nevertheless you will continue the search. Explore the highway in both directions for ten miles."

Laporte had to go. He departed, casting back a pathetic look of grief at his condemned friend and comrade.

One by one the remaining officers and soldiers filed out of the tavern to seek their night's quarters in the hayloft. Last to go were the comrades of the "Terrible Seventh."

"Diantre!" ejaculated Egalité, sitting down, "I'm glad it's over. Condolence is an unpleasant business, both for giver and receiver."

This remark was addressed to the two troopers who had been detailed as his death watch.

He was to pass his last night on earth in the room where his crime had been committed.

General Buonaparte ascertained that there was a goodly sleeping chamber upstairs.

"I will retire there; send up my maps and charts."

As he was leaving the room, piloted by the frightened Annunziata, the commander-in-chief directed a piercing glance at the prisoner.

Egalité half rose.

"Have you anything to say to me, prisoner?"

Egalité hesitated a moment. He might speak one thing, and a thousand.

"No, Citizen General," was the impassive reply, and he settled back in his chair. There was no breach of etiquette; prisoners do not salute.

Buonaparte shook his head and muttered, "Mort de ma vie!" and quickly followed the hostess.

There was perhaps a note of regret in his voice. One brave man always admires another.

Silence, long and profound, followed the commander's exit.

A single candle stood on the table. The instruments of the court-martial and the tricolor had been removed.

One sentry stood at the front door with grounded arms. The other sat opposite the prisoner with gun across his knee. The fire sank to ashes. The candle shed a fitful illumination. Egalité looked at his watch—it said midnight. He suddenly addressed the guard opposite with humorous intonation:

"They failed to take away my pistol; also this hunting dagger."

He produced the weapons and laid them on the table.

"Keep 'em for all I care," quoth the sentry. "I won't touch them. Not in the orders."

The silence was renewed. Both the sentinels, being very tired, began to nod their heads. Egalité reprimanded them, finally in jest told them he would guard himself. Actually the guards fell asleep; the one sitting, the other leaning against the door; they had not rested for many hours.

Egalité, supporting his head with his elbow on the table, at length fell into a mood of serious reflection.

Before his mind's eye the events of his life passed in stately distinct review. Rhadamanthus-like he considered his career, summed up and assessed his life actions; or rather like an abstract philosopher surveying another's completed existence. At times the attitude shifted to that of a morally responsible being, self-accusing. Happily this lucky man had not much deliberate evil to accuse himself of: so he escaped infinite pangs in this solemn hour.

He thought of his childhood, of the days spent under his sweet mother's tuition at the country villa in beautiful Montmorency forest. She had taught him much of the best he knew; she had instilled in his mind the doctrines of freedom and justice with which Europe was now afire.

By one branch of his family a commoner, by the other a nobleman, what an extraordinary destiny was his!

Armand Breteuil, his mother's father, had risen from obscurity to the post of Intendant of the Royal Domains. Louis XV thought much of the man who on many occasions had filled his empty coffers. In fact, he pleased his royal master so well, that Louis insisted on making a noble match for his daughter. Marquis de la Tour d'Auvergne, his favorite chamberlain, had ruined himself, and at the King's command he married the daughter of Breteuil. The old Breton peasant regilded the coronet of the ancient Marquis—but the son-in-law requited him badly.

She was educated, cultured; well read in the encyclopedists—Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot and the others who applied the lever to the antiquated boulder that blocked the highway of human progress. Her husband, inveterate hunter and boon companion—religiously attended the levees of the royal mistresses and left his young wife to herself and her books.

Their only son, Aimé Honoré, learned to sympathize with the downtrodden, to believe in the theory of justice for the masses. At twelve years of age, the angry aristocrat father, during one of his rare visits to Castle d'Auvergne, found his son one day engrossed in a book by Jean Jacques of Geneva. He tore him from the maternal arms and counsels. The poor woman did not survive the separation very long. She soon died of grief.

Old Breteuil vowed vengeance. The boy was placed in a noble military school. The Marquis, his father,

hoped that all traces of his early training would be stamped out of him. Later the youth became a subaltern in one of the King's regiments.

The well-beloved Louis had gone to join his ancestors—without a single tear from his loyal subjects. Another Louis—the XVI—sat upon the bedraggled throne of the Bourbons, suffering for a multitude of sins committed by others. The States-General had been called. By way of evolution it became a National Assembly.

Egalité had not paid overmuch attention to the current of events, but the youth had developed into a man. One day time was heavy on his hands, he strayed into the assembly. A tall, broad shouldered man, with the face of a lion and a voice of thunder, held the floor, and the members listened spellbound. The man's wonderful eloquence held our hero on his seat until the orator had finished amid the deafening applause of the floor and gallery.

The truth of the message convinced him. The ideas were not new to him, he had imbibed them with his mother's milk. Once more his heart beat in sympathy with the people for whose rights the orator had pleaded so eloquently. He asked his neighbor for the speaker's name. The man addressed looked at him in surprise—there was a slight ring of contempt in his retort, "Don't you know Mirabeau?"

From that day Egalité became a daily visitor at the assembly. His father heard of it and his wrath knew

no bounds. At his request the young demagogue was transferred from the guards to a regiment near the frontier.

The news of his seeming renegacy had preceded his arrival at his post, and his aristocratic fellow officers shunned him. Once more Egalité gave himself up to the study of his beloved Maitre Jean Jacques, and when the time came, he cast his lot decisively with the people.

The Terror meanwhile held full sway in Paris, and old Breteuil, who belonged to the inner circle of the Jacobins, saw his opportunity for revenge. He found his son-in-law's hiding place and denounced him. With many other victims he was incarcerated in the Conciergerie. His son heard of it, and hurried to Paris to rescue his father. He had a claim on the new government's gratitude. Through an officer of Danton he obtained a permit to visit the prison. If he had thought he would find his sire downcast, he was mistaken. The old man received him with a smile. He remembered every word of their conversation, if the Marquis' monologue deserved that name.

"Ah, you pay me the honor of a visit, sir—very kind of you. I hope you do not expect me to shout, 'Liberty, Fraternity, Equality,' in place of a greeting. I understand you have changed your name, Monsieur. What do you call yourself?—I beg your pardon—oh, Egalité? I admire you, Monsieur. Just think—if they had hanged your Voltaire and Jean Jacques Rousseau, all this would

not have happened. The whole trouble was brought on by the scribblers. A monarchy overthrown, not by dint of the sword—no, by the pen—what a ridiculous age! It is time for the like of me to go.”

So he went on for hours—listened to with respectful silence by his son. At last he grew tired; stretching himself on the hard floor, he begged his son’s pardon for not being able to offer better accommodations.

Egalité offered him his cloak and hat—the dim light in the large hall seemed to make his escape plausible. The chamberlain would not hear of it. He begged his offspring’s pardon and closed his eyes. Five minutes later he was sound asleep. Egalité sat there watching him.

At dawn the numbers of the victims were called. Among them, the number of the Marquis. Egalité tried to rise and step forth, the old man held him down, and with a firm voice he pronounced the “Here!” which meant his doom. Adjusting his cravat, dusting his shoes with his lace handkerchief, he jauntily stepped forward and mounted the cart waiting outside. He died as he had lived—with a haughty smile at the jeering rabble below.

Tragic and stormy had been Egalité’s career. Not much satisfaction, not much joy had entered his life. Yes—there was one cup of delight—a draught of pure love, and for drinking from it he paid the penalty.

Did he wish now he had acted otherwise?

No! A thousand times no! *He had committed a technical wrong, a military crime, to perform a moral right.* He had sacrificed himself in a good cause. Moreover—noble consolation—he had sacrificed himself for the woman he loved. His first love, his true, his unsullied love. A sublime possession! An idyllic thing, like his country's cause, like religion, good to die for.

It is no detriment to our hero to reveal that now the flesh and blood Francesca stood rather dimly before his vision. He thought of her indeed, but as a disembodied spirit: the calm of the approaching infinite precluded continuance of the lover's raptures. Had he seen her now he would have greeted her in the manner of the poet who met his Beatrice in the Paradiso.

Egalité's contemplations turned on the religious question. He tried to recall the dicta of the encyclopedists on that important subject; they, however, having dismissed it enveloped in a polite haze, he could draw little satisfaction therefrom. The philosophers of the Eighteenth century said the present world was so bad and needed so much rectification that it was absurd to spend time thinking of conditions in another existence. "Nevertheless," reflected Egalité, "it would be convenient to know."

Upstairs the floor began to creak; some one was pacing up and down.

It was the habitually sleepless Corsican, of whom later it was jestingly said he rested when he worked.

After a victory, he did not stop to dally with his laurels. Lodi finished, his imagination went marching on. The indefatigable commander was planning, thinking. He planned for the next day, next week, months, years ahead. Possibly some of his less serious thoughts were upon the case of the condemned prisoner below and what had led up to it.

Up and down he paced. Letters to the Directory were mentally composed, plans of military action were pondered, the merits and demerits of subordinates were considered: a thousand figures, facts, persons, moved in orderly procession in the theatre of that capacious brain. Many a plot of wisdom was slowly reasoned out, which one day would astonish the world as a brilliant inspiration. Many a carefully studied plan would come to nothing and never be heard of. This preliminary, exhaustive toil is largely the inspiration of genius.

Egalité thought of the floor-pacing man upstairs. He realized the extraordinary capacity of that leader; he could not deny him the meed of his great talents, his virtue of invincible courage, tireless labor. His audacious originality was a quality which chiefly foretold eminence.

The words spoken to the innkeeper's wife recurred to him: "Your four walls are safe, but the foundation of the Republic is beginning to shake." A prophetic speech, though spoken at hazard. The germs of tyr-

anny show themselves early. Given a great reckless ambition, and the means—the result is not problematic.

The condemned man thought of Alexander—Cæsar. Robespierre would be the tyrant; he was cut down; others snatched at the reins and had been destroyed. "Ah, France, for thy sake I hope that so much misery be not endured, so many sacrifices made, so much blood be shed in vain!"

The melancholy soliloquy was almost uttered aloud.

The head of the guard was resting on the table. Perhaps psychologically affected by the mental activity of the prisoner, or made restless by his smothered self communions, he muttered in his sleep:

"Yes—dear Manon—a little while—we will all return home."

Egalité smiled gently upon the sentinel, and paraphrased, "Yes, dear Francesca—a little while—home."

A tear came to his eyes, he flicked it away hastily.

But there was no danger of an observer: the other sentinel was equally asleep, though standing up. He leaned against the door and dreamt it was a feather bed.

Back and forth went the footsteps overhead.

Again Egalité reviewed the scenes of his life. Did it not seem that his two score and nine years had been spent in mere turmoil, bloody strife, profitless struggle? Next moment he energetically dismissed the treacher-

ous thought. Better were his few years of right endeavor, of honest labor in the cause of human progress, than a long life of unachieving in another more peaceful part of the earth. He could well pity those debarred from a like career of sublime effort. The result of the effort? It was not his care. Enough to be one of those who at the end of the Eighteenth century saw a light as from heaven, and with holy enthusiasm drew their swords of crusade.

Back and forth paced the man overhead.

"Diantre, he must be in want of exercise!" murmured the prisoner with a humorous glance at the ceiling.

Finally the footsteps ceased. The deepest silence reigned. Dimly the candle on the table flickered. The two sentinels slept so soundly that they neither snored nor made any noise in breathing. The prisoner himself began to feel somnolent. Having settled his earthly accounts as best he could, his mind was freed and his exhausted body demanded rest. He closed his eyes and dozed.

The sentinels posted outside sang out: "Deux heures—tout va bien!"

Egalité was momentarily roused from his stupor; he fell back again.

Suddenly a loud clamor arose; galloping hoofs, shouts of alarm.

"To arms! To arms!" rose the thrilling cry.

Horses neighed, some confused bugler sounded the mess-call.

A man, disheveled and bellowing incoherently, dashed into the tavern with outflung sabre. It was Lieutenant Laporte.

Buonaparte, who had only been resting in his clothes, at the same instant appeared at the upstairs doorway and sharply exclaimed:

"To the devil with your noise! Report, report!"

"Citizen General," gasped Laporte, "a big detachment of Austrians! On the northern highway—hurrying this way—not a mile off!"

"How strong is the enemy?"

"Twelve to fifteen hundred."

One of Laporte's scouts rushed in.

"Citizen General, mount this instant! They've made a flank movement—in ten minutes your retreat will be cut off!"

"How strong is my escort?" said Buonaparte, swiftly turning to his aide.

"One hundred of the Seventh!"

"They will be sufficient to stay their advance in the narrow road. Who volunteers?"

"I, Citizen General!" shouted every man.

"It is certain death," jerked out the commander.

"Long live the Republic!" came from a hundred throats, so that the rafters shook.

"Choose your leader."

The trooper Hulin exclaimed: "Captain Egalité!"

Many other voices cried: "Captain Egalité!"

His eyes flashing with pride, the condemned officer rushed forward. "Thank you, men!—death to all enemies of the Republic!" He instinctively put his hand to his swordless scabbard.

"He goes with me," uttered the terse impassive Buonaparte.

"General," exclaimed Egalité in great excitement, "I appeal to you! I had to do my duty toward the woman I love!"

"You are a traitor, you do not deserve the death of a hero."

"I am not a traitor! You know I am not! Citizen General, you have no right to deny a Frenchman the glory of dying for his country! Every man worthy of the name would have done as I did. Men—comrades, I appeal to you!"

There were quick shouts of approval. "Have mercy—don't begrudge him an honorable death—you are too good a patriot—too brave a man—he deserves to die honorably."

Buonaparte was willful only so far as it comported with policy: to gain an important end he could easily sacrifice a personal resentment.

"Be it so; Captain Egalité commands the volunteers covering my retreat." At the door, turning, he shot a glance at the officer, and dramatically exclaimed—"If we meet again, you walk in hollow square!"

"If we meet again!" repeated Egalité emphasizing the first word. The general understood.

Down the road toward Lodi galloped the fleeing General with his staff.

It was Cesare and the priest who summoned the Austrian detachment to the wayside inn. That pair, riding toward Lodi, had from the side of the road observed the French party pass. Father Pietro recognized Buona-parte by various signs; he well conjectured that Manuele's tavern would be his stopping place. The regiment of fugitive Austrians, when informed of the circumstance by the priest, became transformed into pursuers. The thought of capturing the Corsican commander animated them with utmost zeal.

Before assigning them to their places, Egalité—now provided with a new weapon—lifted up his sabre and thus addressed his men:

"Soldiers of the 'Terrible Seventh,'—perhaps the fate of France—at least the life of your General—is in the scale. The enemy are twelve to our one. Swear upon your flag to fight to the last man—to the last ditch!"

A hundred swords flashed in the air and a hundred throats shouted:

"Long live the Republic!"

"Bugler, sound the attack—'Francesca' our battle cry!"

Following their leader, the men stormed out of the inn

to seek their mounts. They had hardly formed, when the Austrian signal told them of the enemy's approach.

With sabre tied to the wrist and carbine cocked, they made their way out of the yard.

Egalité, followed by the bugler, was the first to reach the highway. A quick glance to the north revealed the white coats of the Austrians. To the right the dense woods, to the left the walls of the inn and the barn. "Leonidas' position at Thermopylæ was no better," reflected the Captain, before giving his orders.

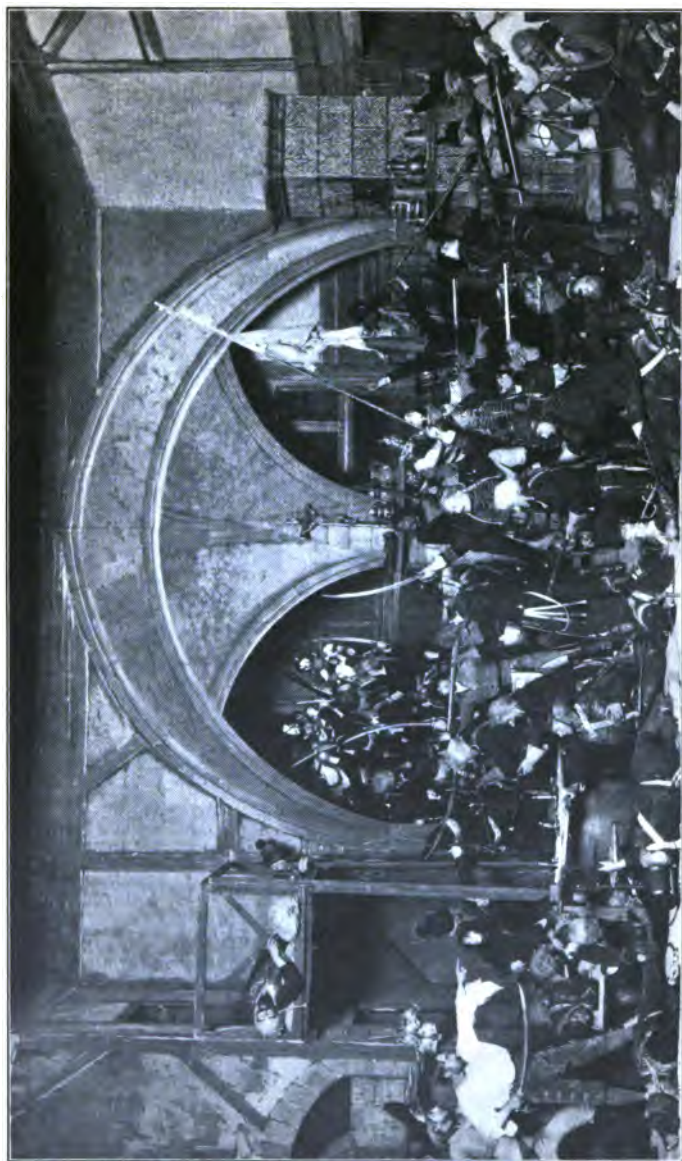
"By my pipe, this is a handy place for a scrimmage," he heard his Lieutenant say.

The white coats were now within two or three hundred yards of the inn. They had come up stealthily in hope of taking the French General and his staff unawares. Their leader, seeing the French hussars awaiting them, raised his sword, and they halted for a council of war. They feared a trap.

This was Egalité's opportunity.

Hoarsely calling to his bugler to give the signal, he leaned forward and spurred his mount. A shrill blast from the bugle, a hundred-voiced "Hurrah!" and amid the swelling notes of the Song of the Sword—"Allons, enfants de la Patrie!"—the Seventh started off on their death charge.

The shock was terrific. A heap of mutilated men and beasts marked the spot where the first clash occurred. The horses became useless in this chaos of



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dead bodies, and Egalité ordered his men to dismount. The Austrians followed their example and stubbornly contested every inch of ground. Charge followed charge—volley followed volley—the ranks of the Frenchmen grew thinner—but undaunted, shouting the hymn of freedom, new men stepped into the breaches left by their incapacitated or dead comrades.

Conte Cesare, unlucky pilot of the Austrians, met his death; not while fighting in the van, but apparently safe behind; a stray French bullet laid him low.

Numbers began to tell and the gallant little troop had to seek refuge in the inn.

The Austrians swarmed around it. They dashed in at the door: there, whirling sabres met them.

In a few moments five of the defenders lay dead; others sprang to their places.

Egalité and Laporte occupied the foremost places at the main door.

Clashing of blades, shouts, execrations, screams, reports of muskets; above all, the grand hymn as the survivors still loudly sang it,

"Le jour de gloire est arrivé!"

"Surrender!" shouted the Austrian commander.

"Never!" roared back Egalité, as he deftly sent another assailant to the floor.

Laporte brought down an antagonist at every line of the Song of the Sword.

It was a scene of fearful carnage. The floor was cov-

ered with blood, which was also spattered on the walls and besoaked the garments of the defenders.

Egalité's strength was giving out: a sabre cut in the left arm made him weak from loss of blood. He breathed heavily. A film began to creep over his eyes. His sword seemed to cut and thrust automatically, without his volition.

The Marseillaise was sung no more. The Frenchmen were silently fighting their death fight.

Two Austrians simultaneously rushed for the door. Laporte slew one; Egalité with lightning speed sabred the other.

At this moment one of the enemy who had leaped in at the window aimed a successful blow at Laporte's head. He fell crying: "Farewell, comrade!" Egalité turned like a flash and killed the Austrian. But more poured in at the window; only three Frenchmen, and they wounded, were left in the room beside the Captain.

"Zounds!" screamed a gigantic officer dashing in, "I am looking for you!"

"I am ready!" responded Egalité.

He clove his burly opponent's skull, but at the same instant he received a blow on his own head which felled him to the floor. His breaking glance caught sight of the window—where he had last seen her. "Francesca!" he whispered. A happy contented smile crept over his face—and he closed his eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

"THE VICTOR AND THE VICTIM."

The fugitive French commander and his party heard the noise of the fighting at the inn before they had galloped half a league down the road toward Lodi.

"General," said Berthier, his chief of staff, "would we not do well to strike into the fields? The enemy may soon be on us."

"Bah! Let them come." He checked his horse and listened. The sounds of the Marseillaise reached his ears. With a "*Mort de ma vie*," he whirled around his horse. The members of his staff, guessing his intentions, closed in upon him.

Berthier took hold of his horse's bridle, and in spite of Buonaparte's protestations, they carried him along at top speed.

Thus they reached the banks of the Adda.

In sight of the river they checked their mounts.

Noticing the ill-humor of the chief, on account of his forced flight, Berthier ventured an apology.

"General, you would have been killed or captured, as sure as fate."

"Diable! Then we would have died like soldiers Who knows ——" He stopped short.

Berthier saw he was in one of his melancholy moods, and he knew the cause of it—Josephine.

The chill morning air continued to bear them news of the events in the rear.

Fainter and at longer intervals came the volleys of musketry. The sounds of the Marseillaise died down and were drowned by the snorting of the horses of his escort.

The victor of Lodi stared into the river, keeping strict silence, which none of the officers dared to break.

The Adda peacefully pursued her course. Nothing told of the awful struggle that had taken place for her possession, hardly twelve hours before.

A sudden jerk of the reins made the white charger prick its ears. General Buonaparte stood up in the stirrups. His sharp eyes had descried a dark mass in the road some distance ahead. He tore his field glass from the saddlebag. The officers followed suit.

"What is it? Soldiers—yes, infantry. There must be at least a company."

"Austrians!" exclaimed young Elliott.

"Yes, Austrians—a detachment gone astray, trying to get in contact with the main force. We will ride through them!" the chief replied to the queries, calmly replacing the glass.

With one voice the officers of the staff advised against proceeding.

Some advised going back and trying to find another road; others, to take to the adjacent woods. General Buonaparte impatiently cut short their counsels. "Messieurs, we will ride through them!" and he dug his spurs into the white flanks of his horse. The six officers drew their sabres and galloped after their reckless leader. They were only seven, but they made a tremendous noise as they dashed down on the Austrian fugitives.

"Surrender in the name of the French Republic!" shouted Buonaparte at the top of his metallic voice.

"Surrender or die!" echoed the staff officers, with lung power not lacking.

The frightened Austrians parted like cattle in a panic; they left the highway clear.

"Throw down your arms!" stentoriously commanded the man on the white horse.

The Austrians actually threw down their arms, thinking the rest of the regiment would be up immediately. They were exhausted, and had scant ammunition left in their pouches. Surrender was a sweet word to them. The more astute perceived they had been outwitted by a handful of audacious Frenchmen. However, their officer had given his parole, and they were prisoners of war. The General's staff began to offer admiring exclamations.

"Save your compliments, gentlemen! Remember, the only motto is—To dare!"

The officers of the staff were dispatched in charge of the prisoners, only young Elliott, for whom the Corsican had a sincere regard, remained with him. He and the General started off on a reconnoitering expedition.

Here and there they came upon traces of the Austrians' flight—muskets, knapsacks, miscellaneous impedimenta dropped by their weary owners in the middle of the way.

"Confound those slovenly Austrians!" exclaimed Elliott, "my horse will break his leg yet stumbling over their baggage."

They were now off the main highway, though they did not know it. The smoking ruins of a deserted village lay several miles to their right. They had inadvertently diverged on a side road soon after the encounter with the enemy's stragglers.

The Corsican was the first to suspect the situation.

"Mort de ma vie, Elliott, we have lost our way."

"It does not matter, General, we shall soon have daylight."

They halted on an eminence which commanded a view of the country, and the winded horses had leisure to recover while their riders stretched their legs.

In the eastern sky gray streaks began to show; the moon was sinking on the horizon.

Buonaparte stood silent by himself, leaning an arm on his horse's saddle. Occasionally he glanced up at the dim-starred sky. His mind once more began to

occupy itself with business—the business of to-morrow and of the next decade. Extraordinary realist and idealist!

Captain Elliott spied a couple of approaching figures.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"We are poor cottagers," came the quavering tones of an old peasant. "Our only son fought with the Austrians at Lodi bridge yesterday. Doubtless he was killed, and we set out to seek his body."

"Advance, old man; let's see your face. Is that your wife?"

"Yes, Signors."

The woman was white haired. She leaned on a staff.

"Hey, that basket on your arm, what have you got in it—jewels?"

"Impossible, Signor! Only lint, bandages—and—and ——"

"Food? A loaf of bread, a bottle of wine? That's just what we could use!"

"It is for our son, who may be dying," said the old woman, pathetically.

"Your son is probably beyond help of food. Here is a gold piece for your basket."

"No, no, Signors!" quavered the bowed-down peasant, while his aged wife began to weep.

"Devils and destruction!" quoth the interrogating Elliott. "Have you no sense? Don't you know I could take your stuff without paying for it, and knock you both on the head in the bargain."

"Ah, Maria," whimpered the peasant, "I told you we were fools to go on this errand. Our poor boy is dead, and these Signors will kill us, too."

Elliott burst out laughing. "Since you are so stubborn and such fools, take this gold piece and keep the basket!"

The aged pair went on their way in puzzled rejoicing.

Elliott approached the musing commander and asked if he did not want to take some rest before daybreak, offering the use of his blanket.

"Thanks, Elliott—I am not tired; lie down yourself. I will sleep to-morrow night, or the night after."

Naturally a man of great physical endurance, he sought to impress his subordinates with a belief that his powers bordered on the supernatural. He never slept while others were awake; when he ate with others he was stoically abstemious. He talked little and that with emphasis. If he ever had a misgiving, a doubt, or a regret, he never revealed it. What came out of his lips was the sharp clarified distillation of his mind.

Elliott began to feel chilled and slapped his body with his arms to keep warm; the General remained motionless as if he were perfectly comfortable.

"What is that, Elliott?" He pointed toward the river.

"I see nothing."

"Follow the direction of my finger. Let us find out."

Elliott demurred. "General, we may run into a morass."

"Nonsense, I must learn what it is."

The two mounted and cautiously rode across the fields toward the glistening water line, which was now and again eclipsed by rising ground or thickening forest growth.

"It is farther than we thought, General. Hadn't we better give it up?"

"No ——" Buonaparte's horse shied violently.

"Diable, don't you know a gnarled fir tree when you see it? You're a poor cavalry beast!" He brought the trembling horse close to the object of its fright, until the beast got accustomed to the sight of it.

The eastern sky had changed from gray to opal and rose. The moon was throwing its last beams on the broad sluggishly-flowing river.

"What you saw in the distance, General, is a log."

"No, it is a boat. Let us dismount and find out who goes boating at such an early hour."

The craft on the water moved slowly down stream, propelled by a pair of clumsy oars. It kept in the centre of the river. There were two occupants, the one rowing and the other seated in the stern.

"A couple of peasants."

"One is a woman."

"Shall I hail them?"

"Wait a minute."

The boat was nearly opposite them. "Now hail them." The aide did so.

The boatman answered by redoubling his efforts.

The passenger turned her face in the direction of the bank. In the break of dawn they could see her face.

"Mort de ma vie! It is the beautiful spy!"

Buonaparte whipped out a pistol and shouted: "Halt, on your life, peasant!"

The man pulled faster on his oars. A bullet flew out over the water; it ricocheted over the boat; another ball missed the rower by an inch.

At that moment the boat and its occupants disappeared behind a little island in the river.

Buonaparte uttered an exclamation of disappointed rage.

"Nevertheless, she won't escape me! Let us follow the river, there must be a ford near by."

"Citizen General, this is madness!—For your own sake and the sake of the army, I protest against this adventure."

"You don't realize that I am charmed against danger."

"I implore you, General, return with me to headquarters."

"Elliott, I am human. I am mad about this woman—I must have her!"

"General, there are hundreds of other women ——"

But none so coy and unwilling as this one!"

"Think of your wife."

"Don't remind me of her now. I have written letter

upon letter to her entreating her to join me, but she prefers to remain in Paris. She bathes in the sunshine of glory that my victories have thrust upon her. Your reminder was ill timed. A brave man has laid down his life, perhaps, for a smile from this red-headed beauty. This in itself recommends her to me. If this *ci-devant* could afford to die for her, she is worth a few moments' attention from General Buonaparte."

"Your logic is unanswerable, General."

"I thought so!"

"Very well, if it must be done."

"It must be done!"

They rode silently along the river banks in search of the ford, while the orient sky continued to redden. A flock of ducks rose clamorously from the surface of the water; the squirrels in the woods began to chirrup and dart about in search of an acorn breakfast.

"General," said the aide, after they had completed a detour to pass a ravine, "as a precaution, I wish you would change coats with me."

"Why so, doesn't your coat suit you?"

"You understand me."

"Well, I do, give me the coat."

"I'll burn a candle at the shrine, if the devil sees us safely out of this."

"The devil has helped me in worse plights—he won't desert me this time."

Buonaparte flung off his uniform and donned the Cap-

tain's. He also exchanged his General's cocked hat for his subordinate's headgear. The General seemed to enjoy this matinal adventure.

"I suppose you'd like to trade horses too, but I won't do that. This white beast is part of my charm. I have ridden him unscathed in six battles."

Meanwhile the sun had risen in all its glory in the east.

Buonaparte eagerly scanned the surface of the river, which ran straight for a couple of miles in either direction. There was no sign of any boat.

"Diable! as I expected."

"Elliott, we must get across instantly. They are on foot, people will have seen them pass; we will surely catch them if we once get on the other shore."

"I don't think this is a ford."

"I'll make one."

The General spurred his charger into the river.

Elliott followed.

The horses had not gone a rod before their hoofs were off bottom. They began swimming, and the weight of their riders submerged every part of them but their outstretched noses. Neither of the animals seemed inclined to proceed, and the spur was required to keep them from turning.

"Ugh! I can recommend the Adda for being icy."

"The current is swifter than I thought, Captain. Diable! We are making little headway."

"We have gone only quarter of the distance, General. We had better slip off the horses' backs and hang on to their tails. They can't stand all our weight."

"Diable, if that's the situation, I'll order a retrograde movement for once in my life. About face!"

They regained the bank from which they had started, wet to the waist and shivering. The horses shook themselves like dogs, streams of water running from their manes and tails.

Men and horses were warmed up by a half mile gallop along the river.

They encountered a peasant woodchopper, who vainly tried to scuttle away into the brush.

"We have no intentions on your life. Just tell us where there's the nearest ford."

"Yes, Signor, I will gladly tell that," said the timorous rustic, putting down his axe from his shoulder. "You follow the shore; about half a mile below there is a good fording place for horses."

"I knew it couldn't be far off."

They dashed on and soon reached the ford, recognizable by numerous hoof prints in the mud.

"This is the place where the cavalry brigade crossed yesterday."

The river was particularly wide at this point, but the water did not reach above the horses' breasts; the bottom was safe gravel all the way across.

"General," said the aide when they had gained the

opposite shore, "shall we not stop somewhere for breakfast before we pursue the search? It is more than sixteen hours since the last apology of a meal."

Elliott was undoubtedly hungry, but he also had it in his mind to divert the commander from the foolhardy quest.

"One thing at a time," responded the stubbornly-resolved Buonaparte. "Know you, Captain, that no man ever succeeded that dropped an enterprise once undertaken. I have set out to make this beautiful auburn-haired spy a prisoner d'amour, and we will stop neither to eat nor drink—at least I will not—until victory perches on my banner."

Elliott sorrowfully perceived that an irresistible insanity had seized his General, and he made no further protest during the remainder of the adventure.

The Corsican was most discreet in the matter of his amours, only allowing one or two trusty confidants to know of his aberrations in this direction; so that to the present day it is the popular idea that he was a demigod of chastity, as of war.

What direction had the boat gone?

Elliott suggested down stream.

"Neither," said Buonaparte; "the man certainly rowed straight ashore after that fright I gave him. Let us ride up to the little island where we saw the boat, and if we find a trace of it. we'll know where to look next."

They raced up the river bank as the morning sun began to clear up the mists that hung over the water.

Buonaparte's surmise was correct. Drawn up in a sandy cove opposite the well-recognizable island near which they had spied the craft, lay a rude flat bottomed skiff. The oars were gone.

"How do we know this is the same boat?"

The General laughed.

"Elliott, you are weakening on account of your long fast. I must let you breakfast. Don't you see those footprints—the footprints of two persons? One wears a shoe half an acre broad, as suits a brawny peasant, the other a dainty five-inch article, as suits the surpassing red-haired beauty whom I seek."

"You are always right, General, and your eyes are as alert for the least as well as the greatest things in the universe."

A farmer's thatched cottage stood on rising ground a little distance off.

They galloped to it across the fields. No one was visible on the premises, but the barking of a dog indicated that the hut was not tenantless.

A sharp rapping with a sabre hilt brought a white faced rustic to the door.

"You have nothing to fear if you tell the truth."

"God forbid, Signor, that I shouldn't tell the truth."

"Then inform me whether in the last hour you have seen a lady with her servant. Ha—no—she may still

be in disguise—have you seen two persons of any description coming from the river ?”

“As the Creator is my witness, Signor, I have seen not a solitary soul besides my poor family since yesterday.”

“If you received a reward to be silent, I will double it to have you speak.”

“In that way I cannot earn a lire.”

“You don’t fear death ?”

“Signor, I don’t know what you mean.”

“We will search your premises.”

“You are welcome to. You will find no concealed persons, no money, only the rags on our backs, and a little black bread and cheese.”

It was evident that the man spoke with sincerity.

“Very well, fetch us a portion of that black bread and cheese. Here is pay. Be quick.”

When the peasant reappeared with a loaf and the half of a small cheese, the interrogator asked a final question:

“What roads are there near here ?”

“Only one, Signor, the road to Pionetto. Cross this grove till you strike a cattle path, which will lead you straight into it.”

“Good!—Allons!”

As they rode toward the highway they munched on the Spartan breakfast furnished by the cottager.

“It is worth while being a soldier for the sake of the hearty appetite one acquires.”

"Very true, General," answered Elliott, grinding his teeth into the hard crust of bread.

"I hope when you write my memoirs you will omit this little adventure."

"Trust my discretion."

"It is one of those personal matters which do not concern the world. Write of me in the style of Thucydides, Elliott."

"I shall endeavor to be suitably historical."

"That is right. The dignity of history demands suppression of details, personalities."

"There may be some rascally novelist who will betray you."

"Well, if the historian gives me my due, I shall not fear injury in the eyes of posterity through the barking of small dogs."

They had reached the highway again.

A house stood ensconced in a grove beside it.

"Here we shall gain some clue."

A half-grown servant girl was clattering in her sabots across the courtyard. She had come from the barn and carried two pails of foaming warm milk.

"Signor soldiers, good-morning!"

"Good-morning, my handsome girl; is your master up?"

"He was, but he went back to bed."

"Oh, did he? May I ask the reason of his early rising?"

"Why, sir, there were a couple ——" The girl suddenly broke off. A window was opened and a threatening fist was shaken.

Buonaparte noticed it.

"Don't hesitate, my pretty maid. Here's a shining piece of money for you. Which direction did the strangers take? Did they obtain horses from your master?"

"Oh," cried the girl in distress, "I oughtn't to have told! Don't ask me. I don't want your money."

"Mort de ma vie!" thundered Buonaparte. "Let me hear everything, this instant. Be quick!"

The terrified servant found her tongue after an interval, and gave the information that about an hour ago a lady in a green dress and a man who seemed to be her servant had hired a couple of horses and ridden off towards Pionetto.

Buonaparte and his companion took the road at full gallop.

Francesca left the inn, piloted by the honest Manuele. They slipped around the back of the house just a minute before the French General and his party clattered up.

"No time, Signorina, to get horses," hastily exclaimed the guide. "We must run across the open patch and then we are safe in the shadow of that line of fir trees."

They darted over the moonlit piece of ground and gained the obscurity as Buonaparte cried halt to his escort.

"Now for the forest half a mile farther."

They had almost made the distance, when Manuele's sharp ears heard running footsteps.

"Santo Paolo, they are after us. We must hide, Signorina, and let them pass."

The inn-keeper seized Francesca's hand and drew her behind a rock screened by alder bushes. The pursuers arrived; six of the French soldiers, led by Lieutenant Laporte. They stopped not far from the rock. Francesca heard Laporte exclaim:

"Comrades, she must be found! If she isn't, 'our Captain is a dead man!"

There were some other words unintelligible, and the searchers rushed on.

"Come on, Signorina, we will enter the forest by a little detour."

"No."

"Eh? Come, we must hasten. They may spread out."

"I have decided to go back."

"Santa Madonna, my lady! What are you thinking of?"

"I cannot let that brave man perish for my sake."

"What! If our enemies quarrel and kill one another, is it our care? True, the Frenchman seems to be a good brave fellow; he'll get out of it some way. Signorina, I know who you are. You are Contessa di St. Angelo. I have received money to help you escape.

As a patriot Italian it is my duty to save you. I won't let you go back."

"You cannot prevent me."

"Yes; if necessary."

"Wretch!"

"Listen to reason. He'll be shot whether or not you are recaptured. You can't help him now by going back."

Francesca, woefully dubitating, at length motioned the guide to lead on. Several times she half resolved to turn back. When she made the last proposition to this effect, as they were slowly traversing a forest ravine, Manuele cheerfully assured her that by this time the Captain was shot—unless he had been pardoned.

To the Holy Virgin ascended many fervent prayers from Francesca's heart, on behalf of her noble knight.

Manuele knew every inch of the country for miles around and could have found his way in the darkest night. Unerringly he led on through wood and meadow, now following a rough path for a little distance, now striking across a seemingly impenetrable jungle of undergrowth.

He was earning a goodly bit of money and likewise performing a virtuous act in saving the lady of high degree. Doubtless he expected further recompense. One reflection for a moment damped his spirits—what havoc the rascally French might make at his hostelry. "No," he reassured himself, "Annunziata is clever.

She will set the best wine before the officers, and they will prevent the men from plundering."

Francesca fared hard in her flight. Sharp stones cut her shoes, bending branches of saplings struck her in the face; several times she stumbled and fell. Every joint and muscle ached, her head became numb and reft of coherent thought; she followed the guide as one walking in sleep. Exhausted as she had been on arrival at the inn, it was a marvel that she could now endure so much more. It must have been owing to the hearty outdoor training of her youth. She had a physique to be envied.

Finally, in a voice that sounded to her like another person's, she asked the swift forest pilot to grant a halt. She sat down on a mossy log; Manuele addressed several questions to her, but she heard him not. In the stupor of her mind two ideas predominated: one related to her physical weariness; the other, a puzzled anguish centred around Captain Egalité's fate. Alternately she seemed to mourn him as dead, and to feel that he was in imminent peril, for which she was to blame and from which she might rescue him if she turned back. Once, dazedly, she started to retrace her steps; Manuele had only to seize her hand and she followed him obediently as before.

"Signorina, rouse yourself! We have rested nearly two hours. It will not be safe to stay in the woods till daylight."

Francesca staggered to her feet. "How far is it to the river?"

"About two miles, as the crow flies."

"I can't walk that distance."

"You won't need to. I'll carry you—once we have reached the river, we will find a boat and row almost up to your grounds."

The last mile seemed like ten, and required the good part of an hour to accomplish.

Manuele left his charge under a wide-spreading oak and went in search of a boat. A fisherman friend of his lived a short distance up the river. Manuele aroused him, and was greeted with surprised welcome. He speedily obtained the loan of a flat bottomed skiff. Francesca was sound asleep, an oak root her pillow, when the honest guide returned.

Drifting and rowing, they proceeded down the river at a rapid rate.

"Thank heaven, Signorina, our troubles are now over; we have the smoothest road in the world and nothing to stop us."

The purple sky reflected in the placid Adda, gave it the color of blood; along the banks the trees began to cast shadows of magic beauty; here and there the river widened, projected a miniature harbor, gracefully curving its channel. Nothing was there visible to indicate that grim war had visited the region; yet these very waters, gently as they flowed, were mingled with the blood of men.

Manuele knew how to handle the oars, and he spared no skill or energy.

"Cheer up, Signorina," he said at intervals, "you will be at Castle Pionetto before the sun reaches the top of yonder trees."

Sweating over his lusty toil, he pleasantly speculated how he would expend the moneys received and the moneys expected for the night's work.

"Shall I build another story to my tavern? or had I better buy another horse, a couple of cows, and lay up a good stock of wine?"

Francesca sat motionless in the stern of the boat, her eyes open, but scarcely seeing anything.

"Ah," soliloquised Manuele, "the water highway is the road for you. This job will be soon finished. Then back to my inn and my Annunziata. I don't believe those French have done any damage. By my soul, if I saw an army of the French now, I'd laugh at them. They couldn't touch me."

It was at this moment of extreme satisfaction, that Captain Elliott's hail came ringing across the water.

"By Saint Anthony, talk of the devil!" muttered the oarsman, bending his back and increasing the stroke.

Francesca did not clearly descry the General, but she did see his white war horse, seen before at the vicarage; the correct conclusion was quickly formed in her mind.

She informed Manuele.

"Santo, if it is General Buonaparte, I will go him a good part better," said the reanimated Italian punningly. "We will put right ashore and he will be off our track. There are plenty of houses near here; we can either stop, or get horses and go on to Castle Pionetto."

Luckily for them, Francesca did not permit tarrying anywhere. As it was, she could only walk with painful slowness. Reaching the main road, they obtained horses from the employer of the simple milkmaid. He knew it was the Contessa di St. Angelo, but did not think it worth while to inform his servant of the fact. Thus occurred the inadvertent betrayal to the pursuers.

The morning dew was still sparkling on the roadside grass, when Francesca and her escort arrived at Castle Pionetto.

General Buonaparte with his aide was meanwhile galloping up hotly, less than three miles behind the object of his pursuit. His insane adventure neared its termination.

"Elliott, we will succeed! We succeed in everything!"

"It is broad daylight, General. We run a thousand risks. We have strayed far beyond our lines."

His remonstrance had no effect.

Spurring his horse until its belly nearly touched the ground, the Corsican sped on without looking back-

ward. The beasts sweated and flung flakes of foam from their champing mouths. As they shot by a cross-road in a hollow, Elliott shouted:

"General, we are lost! There's a troop of Austrian cavalry!"

"Never lost!" responded Buonaparte, as he dashed into a side road.

The Austrians gave chase. They arrived at the side road a few hundred yards behind the fleeing Frenchmen. The Austrians numbered about half a squadron. A volley of lead went singing down the road.

"General, they shoot close!" panted Elliott.

"Mort de ma vie, yes! but I think we're drawing away from them."

Another volley that kicked up the dust beneath their horses' flying hoofs. The white animal made a fine target.

The chase was brief as well as spirited.

Undoubtedly the fugitives' better mounts could have ultimately won the day; but lead propelled by gunpowder has a quicker gait than the best Arabian steed. The third volley tumbled Buonaparte's white charger to earth.

"Ride on, Elliott! It is my salvation!" shouted the ever lightning-witted commander as he felt his steed sink beneath him.

Elliott looked back in painful indecision. He saw

his General deftly leap before the charger fell, and wave his hand to him in energetic significance.

"He has some plan," thought the aide, and galloped on in puzzled dismay.

The Austrians stormed up.

Buonaparte, with folded arms, was politely waiting to receive them. Some of the pursuers halted, while others continued after the man with the feathers on his hat.

"You had a good horse, comrade," said the leader of the Austrians, "but he didn't serve you."

"Unfortunately not," said the prisoner.

"Who are you and what are you doing in these parts?"

Buonaparte did not answer until he saw his aide had made a large gap behind him and would evidently escape his few pursuers.

"Comrade," he said with a dry smile, "you have done something to catch me, but a much bigger fish has eluded your net."

"You don't say so! Who is your late companion?"

"No other than the French Generalissimo—General Buonaparte, who was in pursuit of me."

The Austrian uttered an exclamation of angry disappointment. "Those fools—damn them! They have given up the chase!"

"Now," pursued the prisoner, "I demand to be instantly taken before General Beaulieu: I have important information for him."

The Austrian looked at him with contempt. "Follow me," he said curtly and turned his back upon him.

Two men took General Buonaparte between them, and in that way the victor of Lodi made his entry at Castle Pionetto—where General Beaulieu's chief-of-staff had taken up his headquarters.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT CASTLE PIONETTO.

The whole household of Castle Pionetto was in a state of distracted grief over the terrible news brought by Crispina concerning her mistress. The good servant had returned from the vicarage the previous night. Loud were the laments when her story was told.

"Oh, Francesca! my darling! my child! to think the barbarians, the hideous French Sans-culottes, have carried you off!" moaned Aunt Pamela.

The good maiden lady of the old school tore her kerchief from her neck and shed full many tears upon it. She turned with woeful indignation on Crispina——

"Why did you let her start out on such a crazy caper?"

Crispina had not known the real nature of the Countess's adventure, and the aunt had to set it down as a "caper."

"Boo-hoo-hoo," was the answer. "I couldn't help it. She would go in spite of me."

"Then why did you desert her when she needed you most—when the terrible French carried her off?" Without waiting for response to this, Aunt Pamela began to

berate the late Count di St. Angelo. "Ah, careless man! he let Francesca grow up like a peasant wench instead of educating her to the decorum of a noble-blooded young lady. She could ride horseback before she was ten! was climbing trees when she should have been embroidering. I did what I could; by precept and example I tried to change her hoidenish nature—alas that my time was wasted! My poor niece is now suffering the penalty of her bad education—heaven forgive her father! God in his mercy grant that she be restored to us safe from the hands of the Sans-culottes—though I fear she won't!"

Aunt Pamela shed such a flood of tears that she had to procure a fresh handkerchief.

"To think that she—a St. Angelo—is a prisoner to those ragged revolutionists, those offscourings of French regicides! Oh, horrible! My poor dear Francesca, my dear, poor, darling niece!"

How much more shocked and grieved Aunt Pamela would have been had Crispina's account been a trifle more detailed—had she recounted, for instance, how the Countess disguised herself as a Savoyard piper and thus attired rode off with the French officers!

"You say, Crispina, Father Pietro and Conte Cesare followed them? Then there is some hope, a little hope. We won't quite despair yet." She dried her eyes, but sent for a new handkerchief.

The servants of the household, from major-domo to

scullion, like true Italian vassals, regulated their mourning by Aunt Pamela's. When her lachrymal ducts opened, so did theirs; and every glimmer of consolation was reflected in their motley visages.

As the mariner's spouse, though she knows he is a thousand miles from home, fondly places a light in the seaward window of her cottage, so Aunt Pamela wanted to keep the castle illuminated from top to bottom all that night—vaguely hoping that Francesca might thereby be benefited. However, the illumination only attracted army stragglers, Austrian and French, some of them desperate looking; and not to draw more such moths, the castle was darkened again.

Aunt Pamela knew no sleep and cried an incredible avoidupois of tears. She really loved her niece. . . . Various ideas of rescue came to her. She thought of sending out all the men servants to explore the land.

"That will be impossible, Signora," said the doleful Crispina. "The French are thick as fleas everywhere."

"Well, we will wait till morning, if we must," groaned Aunt Pamela. "In the morning I shall write letters—to the French General, to the Austrian and Italian Generals. I will write to the Court of Turin."

Crispina reminded her that the Conte and Father Pietro were on the track of the abductors.

"That is so; but, in confidence, one needn't expect much from the Conte. He may be a brave man, Cesare, but he has no experience. Father Pietro will possibly accomplish something. Oh, my poor dear niece!"

The night of grief and of alarms—for the army stragglers were numerous and bold—at length passed away. The morning sun, glinting the turrets of Castle Pionetto, brought scant consolation, no news of the missing girl.

Seven o'clock, eight o'clock; no tidings.

Aunt Pamela finally took to her writing table in her boudoir and began composing those letters of appeal to the hostile and friendly Generals.

She had finished the letters, signed and sealed them, when a joyful shout arose in front of the castle.

Everybody rushed out to see the miraculously restored Countess Francesca riding up the lawn with her attendant Manuele.

The aunt uttered a tremulous shriek of joy, Crispina chimed in; the servants emitted a well regulated accompaniment, led by the major-domo. A dozen hands held her palfrey and helped the Countess to dismount.

Francesca, falling into Aunt Pamela's arms, was embraced and kissed beyond all bounds of old school etiquette.

"My darling niece! Oh, how I feared! Thank God, thank God! . . . But what a terrible state you are in—you are so pale—and untidy! Where did you get this old dress—torn too—where in the world have you been, my child! How did you escape the terrible French?"

"This good man is one of those who helped me—he must be well rewarded. But I am all tired out—it is a long story. I must sleep."

"Poor dear, you shall."

Meanwhile Manuele, provided with an audience of men servants, was preparing to do some mild bragging over his deeds.

"Od's bones!" ejaculated a gentleman of the stable. "These be a pair of choice nags—like a broomstick, all back and tail! And you're a nice-looking fellow to be riding around as groom to the Contessa di St. Angelo!"

"Don't be hasty, Mister Stay-at-home," responded Manuele with an easy superiority. "I may be more than you think. I know a good horse when I see one, and I despise these nags as much as you do. My business, if it interest ye, is that of inn-keeper; I keep a thriving house near Lodi. In these last ten hours I've done something worth while. Your Countess, for one thing, is safe at home because of me."

"Pish, what country boy couldn't show a road?"

"That's the way you talk, Smooth-Paunch! Now what if I told you how I outwitted the French Generalissimo? How the French were after us like hornets and I fooled every one—what story would you call that?"

Mockery ceased: Manuele, seating himself on a water barrel behind the stables, recounted his heroic adventures and was listened to with breathless attention.

After Francesca had been put to bed by Crispina, Aunt Pamela summoned Manuele.

The inn-keeper told her about their night's adventure.

He commenced with the arrival of the Contessa and her captors at his inn, and recited the succeeding history to its minutest detail. Aunt Pamela, closely listening, was moved to frequent tears and exclamations of horror. The foot episode, the flight through the forest, the peril on the river, all affected her with equal anguish.

"Signorina," finally concluded the historian, "I have been so intent on the safety of the Contessa that I have neglected to think of the misery that may be mine. I don't really suppose that anything has happened to my Annunziata—she is so clever she could take care of herself, she knows where to be when bullets fly—but I fear my inn is smashed all to ruin and everything spoiled in it. Perhaps burned up."

"You will lose nothing, be assured, good man. If your place is destroyed, the Contessa will bear the expense."

"Thank you, thank you, Signorina! Now, by your leave, I'll get a fresh horse and trot right back to see how things stand."

Manuele soon afterward departed.

Aunt Pamela, almost as much worn out as her niece, took to her couch and shortly began dreaming of a better world, where there were no Sans-culotte warriors.

Shortly after, Prince Otto Louis, chief of staff of the Austrian General, arrived with several subordinates and a small escort at Castle Pionetto.

"H'm—this is likely place. Gentlemen, we stop us

here, rest and wait for aide-Baron Kuffstein to come up, see what news he brings us."

Prince Otto Louis was a portly and a courtly middle-aged personage, whose dress was elegant and whose speech partook of the Babylonish: his Teutonic style was ludicrously veneered with French politesse.

The major-domo and Crispina jointly informed the Prince that the noble mistress of the establishment and her aunt were both sound asleep after fatiguing experiences.

"Ha—h'm—certainly not wake them, not for world. Show us quietly into library. Gentlemen, be careful not to disturb ladies."

In the library his highness had various military maps spread before him on the mahogany centre table, and was proceeding to study them with hem-hawing comments, when the arrival of Baron Kuffstein was announced.

"Now what casualties yesterday, bei Lodi?"

"We lost about eight hundred, dead and wounded; two thousand prisoners, and twenty cannon."

"H'm-er!" ejaculated the Prince regretfully. He bent over the charts and pointed with a bejewelled finger. "Beaulieu at Pizzigettoni, Sebottendorf at Borghetto, here Wusakovitch with Slavonic division—h'm-er. Still strong enough to check Corsican's advance upon Milan, if can count on co-operation from General Colli—h'm-h'm. What hour of the day?"

"It is 10 o'clock, your highness," responded the aide.

"Ten o'clock and no news from Colli—hm-hm. Messenger must have fallen into hands of enemy."

"Our hostess, Countess di St. Angelo," said Baron Kuffstein, came from Binasco, and must have passed through the French lines: the lady may by some chance be able to give information regarding General Colli."

"Why was I not informed of that sooner?" quoth Prince Louis, quickly rising.

"I only recently heard of it myself, your Imperial Highness, on the road."

"H'm-h'm—so, so. Who told him lady passed through French lines!" The "him" referred to Baron Kuffstein, according to German usage in addressing an inferior.

"The Italian peasant—an inn-keeper—who guided her through the night."

"Tell man to come up."

"I did not detain him, Imperial Highness."

"Teufel! H'm-er—too bad! Ask lady to grant interview as soon as convenient."

The aide turned to go after saluting.

"Apropos, lady young?" asked the Prince.

"Young, and if I may venture to repeat rumor, very beautiful."

His highness straightened himself up, arranged his cravat, looked into a mirror, and ran his imperial hand over his chin.

"Send up valet to shave me. Can't receive lady in this condition." Voices were heard at the door. The Prince added: "Eh? What's that? Go see."

At the door Baron Kuffstein reported:

"An officer of the Zach regiment, and two soldiers, with a French prisoner."

"Let them enter."

Buonaparte, blindfolded, and in Elliott's uniform, was escorted into the room. He had been pinioned but his arms were now free.

"An officer of the French staff," explained the Austrian Captain. "We shot his horse under him and got him before he could extricate himself. He demands to see General Beaulieu."

"So—what does he wish with General Beaulieu?" said Prince Otto Louis, addressing the blindfolded prisoner. "Can he not convey his information to me?"

Buonaparte, chafing under the indignity of his bandage and the tone of the speaker, curtly asked:

"Whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"Prince Otto Louis, chief of staff of General Beaulieu."

"I have news," said the prisoner boldly, "for the General-in-chief from General Colli."

"Teufel!" exclaimed the Prince, and turning to the others, "er—withdraw—but—h'm—remain within call." Going up close to the prisoner, "Now, what is news? Where is General Colli?"

Buonaparte first tore the bandage from his eyes, then fixing a keen gaze upon the mild, heavy features of his Imperial Highness, answered:

"He is not coming."

"Verwünscht!" exclaimed the Prince.

"His messenger," pursued the other, "was caught by our Seventh Hussars."

"Donnerwetter! Sacré, bleu! Then we must retreat. This gives the Corsican all Lombardy—Milan without striking a blow for it! Voila, nothing left but to fall behind the Po. Verfluchte italienische schweine-wirtschaft."

Then calming down a little, "He is an officer of the staff?"

Ironically Buonaparte turned as if looking to see whom the Prince addressed as "he."

"Ah, your highness is addressing me? Yes, I am an officer of the staff."

The Prince patted his cravat in deep reflection.

"H'm—er. What I cannot understand is his reason for giving this information. Sans-culottes generally prefer being hang to opening their mouths. N'est-ce pas vrai?"

"I am the victim of persecution. I was condemned to be shot by General Buonaparte and just managed to escape with my life."

"Shot? Why?"

"I interfered in one of his love affairs—but principally on account of my lineage."

"Lineage? H'm-h'm. What does he mean? What is his name?"

"My name, Marquis de la Tour d'Auvergne."

It is a well known psychologic fact that all liars lie on some established basis; swindlers assume the name of their acquaintances, and deceivers generally found their fabrications on some near and convenient truth. So Buonaparte, casting about for a plausible narrative, donned the precise personality of Egalité his victim. It was the original intention to play Elliott, but the role of Egalité was more convincing, and moreover tickled the Corsican's sense of humor.

Prince Otto Louis changed his tone to one more amiable.

"H'm—er—take seat."

The Prince's valet entered; Buonaparte half rose.

"Keep seat—don't disturb me—continue conversation while man shaves me—" The valet went out. "Expect lady's visit.—H'm—er—saw your error and came to fight for the good cause? Badly in need of good officers—But, donnerwetter!"—The prince stopped patting his cravat and stood before the prisoner—"How do I know you are not impostor? Have any connection in our lines to identify?"

Somewhat taken aback, the pseudo-Marquis replied:

"I am sorry, your highness, but I know no one in your lines."

"Perhaps know chatelaine,—Contessa—er—di St. Angelo?"

"I have not that honor."

"Er—very beautiful, I hear." To himself, the Prince said: "Vraiment, no need to identify. He is nobleman, his blood does speak in face."

Prince Otto Louis took a correct view of Buonaparte as far as appearance went. No aristocrat could have surpassed him in hauteur of countenance and bearing.

Preceded by a servant who announced "Madam Pamela di Pionetta," the worthy aunt of Francesca appeared, having had a good sleep, donned a brocade gown, powdered away all traces of her morning tears, and become a very stately, courteous dame.

"Pardon the interruption, your Imperial Highness." She curtsied elegantly. "My niece, Contessa di St. Angelo, wishes to know if your Imperial Highness"—curtsy—"will do her the honor to dine with her?"

"Thank you," quoth the Prince, bowing low. "Kindly tell Contessa that accept with pleasure."

"I hasten to inform my niece of your Imperial Highness's"—curtsy—"gracious acceptance. Your Imperial Highness," she bowed herself out with half a dozen graceful curtsies.

Buonaparte's vision had been uneasily roving about the apartment as though he were considering a means of escape; he frowned.

The valet reappeared. "Shave quickly, Lafleur, and get other uniform," ordered the Prince.

"Your Imperial Highness," stammered the flunkey,

"the trunks with your Imperial Highness' wardrobe, shaving outfit and perfumes, were lost when we—when we——"

"When we what? Spreche er aus."

"Retreated before the French last night after the battle of Lodi!" quoth the valet timidly.

"Devil take that Corsican Sans-culotte!" ejaculated the Prince fervently. "Er—h'm—er—we will have to receive lady unshaven and in field uniform. H'm—er—shocking." Running his hand over his unshaven chin his highness turned to Buonaparte. "My dear Marquis, information you gave most valuable, but h'm—can't act upon it till you are identified. Meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile?" repeated the pseudo-Marquis.

"Will have to keep you prisonnier de guerre. You will be treated according to your rank."

"Mort da ma vie!" swore Buonaparte under his breath.

"H'm—er?"

"I was saying—thanks, your Imperial Highness."

An unguarded glance of ferocity, like that of a trapped tiger, chanced to be perceived by Prince Otto Louis. He looked curiously at the prisoner, and called to the door:

"Man here your prisoner till further orders—h'm—er—Shoot him if he attempts to escape."

Baron Kuffstein entered with drawn sword to take charge of the alleged Marquis.

At the same moment, a servant announced the Contessa di Monza and Madame Pionetta.

Buonaparte in consternation saw the face of Francesca. Without being seen by her, he very quickly made his exit by the other door, followed by Baron Kuffstein.

Bowing and scraping, Prince Otto Louis murmured: "H'm—er—charmante—sehr charmante—Contessa is welcome."

Aunt Pamela remained modestly in the background to rise when his Highness rose and not to sit before he did.

As Francesca stood before him in a rich lace gown, her heavy auburn hair contrasting with the white marble of her forehead, her delicate features stamped with a graceful hauteur, Prince Otto Louis was really struck with an admiration that moved his imperially blasé heart.

"Donnerwetter!—Contessa, I—er—h'm——"

To signify just how much he was affected, his Highness with an energetic sweep of his arm brushed maps and papers from the table to the floor and made room on a divan for Francesca to sit down.

She, quite composed—"Your Imperial Highness wished to see me?"

"Er—quite so—I—er—begged interview for purpose of obtaining some—er—h'm——"

"Yes?" smiled Francesca, momentarily diverted from her melancholy thoughts.

"Er—yes—wished to inquire—er—h'm—if Contessa had pleasant journey."

Baron Kuffstein entered, saluted. The Prince waved his hand impatiently.

"Er—h'm—don't wish to be disturbed."

"Your Imperial Highness—urgent—" began the aide.

"He has heard what I said!" quoth Highness with raised voice. The aide departed. "Pardon slight digression, Contessa."

"Had not your Imperial Highness better take the man's report? I understood him to say urgent. I will withdraw meanwhile." She rose.

"Not at all. Er—h'm—wouldn't think of it for worlds." The Prince stared long and hard at Francesca, as is the innocent wont of Royalty seeing an admirable object.

At length, evading his disagreeable gaze, she said:

"I can't tell your Imperial Highness how unhappy I am at the unfortunate turn of affairs yesterday."

"Lieber Gott!" exclaimed his Highness shrugging his shoulders. "Fortune of war—but not irremediable—h'm—er—not at all. Are still in position to hold our own and prevent Corsican from entering Milan if—h'm—er—we knew whether can count on Colli's coming to assistance. Then would be our privilege to redeem our honor—conquer under your beautiful eyes and receive laurel from these fair hands."

The Prince kissed the fair hand to the contemptuous annoyance of their fair owner.

"What information can I give your Imperial Highness?"

"Er—yes—Contessa comes from Binasco, I am told, and must have passed through French lines—thought your ladyship might have heard something of whereabouts of Colli—seems earth has swallowed him and his twenty thousand men. With his corps to assist us, we could crush Corsican. Just now French officer brought news about capture of messenger—Colli not coming—don't quite trust man. Er—h'm—has ladyship heard anything while passing through French lines? Slightest clue of utmost importance just now."

Francesca, repressing her agitation, slowly answered:

"I think I did hear something about a messenger having been captured."

"H'm—er—Frenchman was right then."

The Prince rose "Pray, think hard—Contessa—one word means everything. Is Colli coming? If not, we must retire till reinforcements arrive from Tyrol! Colli, does he come?"

A moment of great struggle within Francesca's breast. She had the significant information, she could perform a large service to her country. But what sacred promise had she given to Captain Egalité as to the contents of those dispatches? Not to reveal them to a living soul!

Half rising from the divan, she fell back. "I have heard nothing"

"Donnerwetter!" exclaimed the disappointed ques-

tioner. Looking at her, she seemed to be in a half fainting condition. "Contessa! Ha! fatigue of journey—salts!"

Madame Pionetto quickly approached.

"It is nothing," said Francesca, recovering. "Don't trouble."

Outside a loud voice suddenly arose. "I must see him!"

"You cannot enter," came the gruff tones of Baron Kuffstein.

"My message brooks no delay!"

The door was thrown open, an Austrian officer appeared bearing the tattered remnant of a French battle flag. He struck the staff on the floor and saluted.

"Who intrudes?" quoth the Prince angrily.

"I ask your Imperial Highness' pardon. Colonel Wirdt sent me with this flag of the Seventh—the French general's bodyguard—We encountered them on our retreat, intrenched at an inn on the outskirts of Lodi."

"Er—h'm—how many prisoners?" asked the Prince, wiping the perspiration excitedly from his brow.

"They would not surrender—so we shot them down."

Filled with anguish as she had been before, Francesca had wildly hoped against hope. She uttered a piercing shriek and sank senseless to the floor.

"Himmel—Donnerwetter—salts—water!"

Madame Pionetto rushed forward and ministered to her unconscious niece.

They laid Francesca on the divan. His Highness fluttered about, uttering excited ejaculations. "Open her corsets, hein?"

"My niece wears no corsets, your Imperial Highness."

"H'm—er—splendid figure; take her to her chamber. Aide will assist Madame. I will hear rest of report."

Francesca's eyes opened. She looked blankly about her, then seeing the Austrian officer with the battle flag, she recollected and faltered pathetically:

"Not one?"

"Mademoiselle—" began the officer.

"Taisez-vous! I suggest Contessa retire—war terrible thing—often too much nerves of man."

"I beg to remain, your Imperial Highness," said Francesca, sitting up. "I am strong enough to hear the worst." She bit her lips to prevent their quivering. Her limpid eyes shone with an affecting lustre.

"Pardon, Contessa, don't quite understand. Er—h'm—the worst?"

"Proceed," said Francesca to the officer in a choking voice.

"There were about a hundred ambuscaded about the premises. They charged upon us—but we drove them back into the tavern. With sword and gun we finally laid them all out; but in clearing the inn of the bodies, we came across two that were not dead. One was the officer ——"

"Where are they?" asked the Prince.

"In the hall."

The officer went out saluting, receiving a gestured command.

Francesca in tremulous accents: "May I speak to the captured officer, your Imperial Highness?"

"Why wish to excite yourself, Contessa?"

Forgetting herself, she cried half hysterically: "I must see him, I must—he has a message for me—he will tell me how he died—died for my sake!"

The thought never entered her mind that Egalité lived.

The Prince was puzzled. "Don't quite grasp, Contessa—but I am old enough to know—woman always has her way. Er—let prisoner enter."

Francesca's eyes were riveted on the door.

Captain Egalité appeared. His uniform in rags, his left arm in a sling, his head bandaged, scabbard empty; a fragment of tricolor tied around his waist. He stood with feeble knees, yet head upright.

Mutely Francesca gazed for an instant; her heart gave a tremendous thump; then she rushed towards him, laughing and crying.

Egalité's wan face lit up with wondrous emotion; his impulse was to clasp her to his breast; remembering where he was, in whose company he found Francesca, a poisonous suspicion came into his mind. His eyes travelled about the apartment, from the Prince to Francesca, from her to the Prince. He laughed harshly and stepped back.

Realizing his thought, she cried out: "I did not do it, no! no! Oh! Heavens!" She would have fallen, had not Aunt Pamela received her in her arms.

"H'm—er—hysterics," quoth the Prince, pacing vexedly to and fro. "Knew strain would be too much. Really think Contessa ought to retire. Thank you for valuable information about messenger—will not fail to mention loyalty of Contessa in report to His Majesty."

The Prince offered to kiss her hand as a hint that she had permission to retire. Francesca refused to take the hint and indignantly motioned to Aunt Pamela to leave her alone.

"H'm—er ——" The Prince turned to Egalité: "Know Contessa?"

"No, your Excellency," said the prisoner. "I once thought—I do not."

"His name?"

"Captain Egalité of the Seventh Hussars."

"H'm—er—Is your General-in-chief still at Lodi?"

With a sorrowfully accusing glance at Francesca, the prisoner: "I presume your Imperial Highness knows as much as I."

"Hein?" The Prince observed the glance. "H'm—er—of course we know—know all—got him this time."

"Great God! Has he been captured?" cried the prisoner.

"Captured? Who? Ah!—" Highness realized he had some advantage, he did not know what. He looked quizzically at Egalité and added at random: "H'm—yes—er—he is in our hands."

"This is a blow to poor France!" the prisoner ejaculated. "What a fool I was to believe in a woman's honor—in a woman's word! How she must have laughed at the credulous, soft hearted fool!"

"Woman?" said the Prince, rapidly. "What woman?"

"A countrywoman of Mademoiselle," answered the prisoner harshly, after a moment's hesitation.

"If," exclaimed Francesca with dimmed eyes and appealing gesture, "she is a countrywoman of mine, Monsieur, and she gave her word, she would rather die than break it!"

"Contessa knows lady?" queried Highness.

"No, your Imperial Highness. But I must defend a countrywoman who cannot speak for herself." Throwing back her head, she addressed the prisoner. "What proof have you that she betrayed you?"

Egalité bitterly responded:

"I heard with my own ears how she was commended for breaking her word, for her treachery. A hundred brave men have paid their lives for my folly. Perhaps thousands more, panic stricken at the loss of their leader, will pay for it before the sun goes down. To protect her honor, I was ready to die the death of a traitor. She requites me thus." He turned his back as if waiting to be led away.

Francesca's eyes flashed indignantly through a tearful haze. She cried:

"It is infamous to hurl such accusations at a woman at a moment when she is unable to defend herself!"

"H'm—er—splendid in her temper," quoth the Prince with enthusiasm.

"I do not know how it is in your France," continued the woman, beautiful in her vehemence, "but we are taught that a word is as good as an oath! You speak about *your* country—what about *her* country! I understand you said she is an Italian. What do you know of the struggle within her? On one side, her promise to the man she loves, on the other, her duty to the children of her own soil! Which is the right way for her to go? You masters of creation, if you sacrifice a cause for the sake of a woman, women make a martyr of you—if you break the woman's heart, men hail you as a hero! You staked your life for her; believe me, she would rather be dead than see that man doubt her, whose faith should be strong enough to believe her against the whole world!" Francesca paused. Egalité looked at her with confused admiration. He was almost persuaded, and at another word would have cried out a dangerous apology. She added quietly: "Your Imperial Highness, I can be of no further service to you. I beg permission to retire."

Egalité was puzzled and disappointed.

"H'm—er—yes—beg Contessa not to inconvenience

herself," murmured the Prince. "Allow me to express admiration for defence of countrywoman. Contessa desirable friend—but imagine dangerous enemy."

Highness led Francesca to the door, kissing her hand. She departed with Aunt Pamela, not looking at Egalité.

"Au revoir, Contessa." The Prince seated himself. "H'm—er—now then, a few questions, prisoner. Familiar with officers of your staff?"

"I am."

"What do you know about Marquis de la Tour? H'm—name evidently familiar!"

"Quite," smiled Egalité.

"H'm—er—what do you know about Marquis?"

"Nothing that he could boast of, your Imperial Highness."

"H'm—depends on view you take. Was condemned to be shot?"

"How does your Imperial Highness know?" said the surprised prisoner.

"Told you—know all. What was cause?"

"He was accused of treason."

"H'm—er—know Marquis by sight?"

"As well as I know myself."

"Good." And stepping to the door, Prince Otto Louis called: "Marquis de la Tour!"

Buonaparte, attired as a Captain of staff, confronted the utterly astonished Egalité.

The Prince narrowly watched the faces of the two prisoners.

After a long pause Egalité spoke with slow emphasis:
"So we do meet again!"

Buonaparte, never moving a muscle of his pallid visage, briefly and coldly responded:

"Yes. This is your opportunity for revenge."

A tumult of opposing thoughts raged in Egalité's mind. He was struggling with a fierce temptation. But nobler sentiment soon conquered.

Egalité hissed out the words of salvation in assumed wrath, pointed to Buonaparte and exclaimed:

"Yes, he is the traitor!"

Buonaparte's eyes lighted up; otherwise he showed no emotion.

To render his generous deception even more convincing—perhaps also as some relief to his real feelings—Egalité took a step toward the pseudo-Marquis and ejaculated disdainfully: "Judas!"

"Were not asked to criticise man's actions," sharply interjected the Prince. "Wish to God other men in his station in the ranks of Sans-culottes would see their way back to duty toward King."

Buonaparte ironically bowed his head.

"Marquis," pursued the Prince, "do you know country around here?"

"Perfectly, your Highness."

"Write down information you have given for General Beaulieu and corps commander. From to-day you are in service of His Majesty."

With another ironical bow, the false Marquis sat down to the table and commenced to write.

A courier entered, followed by all the Prince's aides.

"A dispatch from the Court of Turin," explained Baron Kuffstein, "for General Beaulieu, or the officer next in command."

The Prince quickly opened the document, glanced at it and dropped it with a woeful "Donnerwetter!"

"What is it, your Imperial Highness? Bad news from General Colli?" chorused several officers.

The Prince turned to the assiduously writing Buonaparte. "A confirmation of your report." The repentant convert to monarchism gravely stopped writing. Prince Otto Louis went on: "General Colli is not coming. Court of Turin has sent emissary to open negotiations of peace with France."

The Austrian officers gave forth a sorrowful murmur.

Buonaparte rose; his chest expanded; his eyes flashed.

"Long live the Republic!" excitedly proclaimed Egalité.

The Prince, looking on the exultant prisoner with mournful reproof, murmured: "Vae victis—woe to the conquered."

"I beg your Imperial Highness' pardon," said Egalité recovering his tact.

"H'm—h'm—our allies gone, we will have to evacuate our position, retreat behind the Mincio, and leave Lombardy to the Corsican without striking a

blow." Bending over a chart, the Prince addressed his aides: "You ride to Borghetto and inform General Sebottendorf of peace negotiations—you to General Wusakovitch—you to General Beaulieu."

Buonaparte, also consulting the map, spoke: "To reach General Beaulieu he will have to pass through Augereau's corps, whose lines extend as far as Pizzigettoni."

"H'm—er—will you earn your Colonel's commission Monsieur?"

"Any service your Excellency wishes," coolly responded Buonaparte.

"Then you take the news to General Beaulieu."

"Will General Beaulieu trust me, a stranger?" A stroke of clever deprecation which drew a sneer from a supercilious young aide.

"Er—you shrink from the risk?" said the Prince.

"Not at all, you Highness!" A satirical smile played on the lips of the pseudo-Marquis. There might be more perilous assignments for him than entering the French lines!

"H'm—take this ring—it will identify you. A good horse for the Colonel! . . . And Godspeed!"

Buonaparte received the ring. His pallid, inscrutable face flushed. Drawing himself up to his full height, in a ringing voice he exclaimed:

"This day, your Highness, shall henceforth be a red-letter day in my calendar. I am beginning to believe in my destiny!"

The future world-harrier saluted the Prince and turned on his heel.

At the door, passing Egalité, Buonaparte whispered with curt emphasis, a peculiar smile on his thin lips: "You and I are quits!"

Egalité said nothing.

All the aides had departed except Baron Kuffstein. He was despatched with—"H'm—er—tell chatelaine, beg permission to make adieux. Then give marching orders to commanders of regiments."—To Egalité the Prince said: "What shall I do with him? He has choice to give his parole not to fight till war is over, or go into captivity—hein?"

"I choose captivity!" said the prisoner.

Egalité was marched out of the room between two soldiers.

Francesca entered. "I hear your Imperial Highness is going to leave us—I hope not before dinner."

"H'm—er—with greatest regret, Contessa. Your court—h'm—intimidated by Corsican's victories, has begun peace negotiations. Are your allies no longer—may be enemies to-morrow. However, shall never forget beautiful Castle Pionetto and fair chatelaine's kind hospitality. Hope to have chance to—er—reciprocate when tide of fortune turns." An Austrian bugle sounded below. The Prince started toward the door "This means good-bye—h'm—er—Won't Contessa do me the honor of receiving salute of my escort? One glance of beautiful eyes makes heroes of poor devils?"

"Make heroes of my future enemies," said Francesca, accompanying his Highness to the balcony.

"This was façon de parler—wouldn't dare measure arms with you."

Francesca, looking down, gave a quick start. "What is your Highness going to do with those two French officers?"

"Will be marched to Fort Mantua—refused to give parole."

"Marched!"

"Are short of horses."

"Your Highness, in the name of humanity—they will never reach there alive!"

"H'm—er—yes—are pretty badly used up. H'm—er—what can I do? Can't leave them here unless give parole."

"Your Highness," said Francesca, drawing a deep breath, "I vouch for them!"

"Contessa takes great interest in them—hein?"

"I don't deny it. One of them did me a great service—the greatest a man can do a woman—at the risk of his own life. If this does not seem much for a soldier—he did more; he brought disgrace upon himself for my sake."

"H'm—er—" quoth the Prince shaking his finger at Francesca, "then Contessa seems to know woman he spoke of, after all."

"Perhaps." She lowered her eyes and a fleeting blush appeared.

"Know her very well? . . . H'm—er—understand now—*affaire de coeur*." This aside. To her aloud: "Why will beautiful woman like Contessa throw herself away on Sans-culotte?"

"Because I love him," said Francesca simply.

"Has insulted you?"

"Appearances were against me."

"Have chance for revenge now."

"I'll have revenge—but in my own way—if I may, your Highness."

"H'm—er—wish I were in his place." The Prince added seriously: "You shall have your revenge, Contessa; but remember, if he is caught with arms in hand will be treated same as spy and hanged to next tree."

Francesca uttered a little exclamation.

"Er—you take responsibility?"

"Yes," said Francesca firmly, "if, as I've said, your Highness will let me manage it in my own way."

"At your orders," bowed the Prince.

"Have him blindfolded, his hands tied, and send him up here."

"What woman will, God wills," quoth the Prince with a profound obeisance, kissing her hand. "H'm—er—what shall we do with old fellow? Presume don't care what becomes of him?"

The old fellow, of course, was that grand gruff soldier Lieutenant Laporte. His skull bore a dent from an Austrian blade, but he recked little of that, and only

grumbled because the ungentlemanly foe had deprived him of pipe and tobacco.

"Send him up, too," said Francesca. "He is included in my revenge."

"And my reward?" asked the Prince.

His Highness was permitted to touch the Contessa's forehead with his lips. "Lucky devil," he murmured, thinking of the Sans-culotte prisoner. He patted his cravat with melancholy grace.

"Auf Wiedersehen!" and Prince Otto Louis, quintessence of polished royalty, wheeling to the door superbly salaamed his portly self away.

Aunt Pamela entered just in time to say: "Your Highness," and to dispatch a pair of curtsies after the disappearing skirts of the Prince.

Egalité's voice came from below: "I protest against such treatment!"

"By my pipe!" came another voice less tuneful.

Francesca ran to the balcony in a flutter. She ran back as steps sounded in the adjacent hall.

"Take these flowers to his Highness, dear aunt—quickly, or you'll miss him." Aunt Pamela went.

An Austrian Corporal with his squad led in Egalité and Laporte, pinioned and blindfolded, harshly commanding: "Step forward. One, two, three—halt!" While saying "one, two, three," the indignant captives were whirled around that many times. "Here are the two prisoners. His Imperial Highness orders that

they are not to be treated too badly." The Austrians marched out.

The prisoners stood silent a moment. Francesca watched them with dancing eyes.

"By my pipe, here we are at last?" growled Laporte.

"Where?" quoth Egalité.

"In an Austrian dungeon, to be sure. Lord knows we worked hard enough for it."

"Why didn't you give your parole?"

"By my pipe, what do you take me for—an old woman?"

"We must bear our fate like soldiers."

"Quite right. I couldn't cut my throat if I wanted to"—Laporte strained at his ropes—"nor scratch my head where the villains tried to tap my brains. Bah—ugh!"

"Take it easy," suggested Egalité.

"Why don't you say, sit down and make yourself at home! What a rascal our jailor must be, since they had to warn him to treat us like human beings!"

"We are prisoners of war. They'll have to treat us according to our rank."

"That's why they throw us into this dog kennel!"

"I must admit, my head burns like fire," said Egalité.

Francesca slipped to a side table, dipped her handkerchief in a flower-vase, and deftly placed it on the Captain's brow. She also put a chair behind him and gently pushed him into it.

"Thank you, comrade."

"What for?" asked Laporte.

The jesting angel of mercy attempted to loosen Egalité's bonds. He started up and sniffed eagerly.

"Do you smell violets?" The invisible angel flew to the other side of the room. "Who's there?"

"Nibbling rats and yours truly," responded Laporte. He shuffled his feet, under cover of which the angel again hovered near. "By my pipe, I do smell something flower-like. Who's there?"

"The breeze," suggested Egalité, "has brought us the scent from some distant garden."

"How long are they going to keep us here?"

"I presume, till the war is over."

"Damn it, by that time my shoulder blades will grow together." He tugged at his ropes. "Captain, have you got good teeth?"

"Yes."

"Then for God's sake see if you can't chew through this rope. I'd do as much for you, only my grinders aren't sharp. When I'm free, I'll let you loose in a jiffy."

The angel of mercy laughed in her sleeve.

"Unfortunately, Lieutenant, while my teeth are good my jaws ache; they couldn't stand the strain."

"By my pipe, I wish I had the cause of all this once between my fingers—that red-haired Italian vixen! Yes, 'The poor girl! Cruel to make her ride through the

night! Can hardly stand up!" She had strength enough to reach the white-coats and send 'em on us, the little devil!"

"I beg, Lieutenant, you won't speak of her," said Egalité sternly.

"Not speak of her? Little devil!"

"Lieutenant!"

"I shall choke if I don't. I'll curse her morning, noon and night!"

"Then I shall regret not having been put in solitary confinement."

"Bah—ugh!" groaned Laporte. "No place to sit down but the floor, no water, no rations, no 'baccy. This is next door to Hades. I'd give my head for a glass of water. As for that hussy of a Countess or whatever she is, aren't your eyes opened yet? Do you still believe in her?"

"No," said Egalité sadly. The angel yearned particularly to manifest herself at this moment, but she restrained herself.

"I thought you'd come to your senses. Comrade, there isn't a trustworthy woman in this world! Ouch, what'd you step on my foot for?"

"I didn't step on your foot."

"You did."

"You're dreaming, Lieutenant. . . I would not have believed it of her if I hadn't with my own eyes seen her here with my enemies."

"Eh—what? where?"

"Here—when I was called up. I suppose it was above in the parlor of the jail." Then lapsing into a reverie, and uttering his thoughts aloud, he said: "She threw her arms around me, for one short moment I felt her warm lips upon mine——"

"Warm lips! Comrade are you going daft again?"

"Ah, comrade, love! love!"

"By my pipe, that tune pleases me about like the heehawing of army mules."

"There's nothing in the world," proclaimed Egalité, "but love! All else we live for—glory, wealth, fame—they are empty things. One moment lived in paradise is not too dearly paid with death. . . Ah, why wasn't I mercifully killed at Lodi inn!"

Laporte was compelled to perceive the anguish of his Captain's concluding words. He awkwardly assumed the rôle of comforter. "Don't give way, comrade. I didn't think you felt like that. After to-day there is to-morrow, and time heals all wounds."

"This wound will never heal. Her treachery cut me to the heart."

Francesca took Egalité's arm and swiftly led him to the far corner of the room. The blindfolded Captain was too surprised to resist. She knelt before him, took his hand. Tears were in her eyes.. She spoke in a low thrilling voice.

"And if she came to you and said: "I have not be-

trayed you, I have kept my word despite all temptation—because I loved you—would you believe her?"

Egalité, stunned by the accents, scarce able to think it was Francesca, answered agitatedly—"I could not resist her; her kiss still burns on my lips; I'd have to forgive her—but I'd despise myself for my weakness!"

"The worst appearances prove nothing," pleaded the unknown. "It was by chance the Prince and his staff stopped under her roof. She betrayed no one and nothing."

"Comrade, who the devil are you talking to?" grunted Laporte, pricking up his ears.

"She pleaded for your freedom," went on Francesca in still lower voice. "Why should she if she did not care for you very, very much?"

"Where are we?"

"At that castle where you are to be bound with chains of roses, as she prophesied to you. Also where you will teach her the doctrines of Rousseau—the religion of love, of freedom and equality which your mother taught you, which you cherished and devoted your life to, which shall be mine henceforth!"

She had removed the bandage from his eyes and unfastened his bonds.

"Francesca!" he exclaimed with emotion and opened his arms. He stopped. "And what of my country?"

"I have given up mine for your sake. I can't call myself a daughter of Italy any longer. So I should al-

ways think myself second in your heart if you were not to do the same for me. A new love, a new country which will be not mine nor thine but ours!"

"What do you mean?—Yes, across the ocean from whence came the first ray of freedom, where Lafayette fought for the rights of man—there we may find a common home, the ideal land of our aspiration."

"Then you promise?"

"I promise——"

"Not to draw your sword again?"

Egalité hesitated a moment: her pleading eyes looked into his with sweetness irresistible.

"Dearest Francesca, accept my parole!" He clasped her in an ardent embrace.

Laporte meanwhile had been fuming, fretting and growling in crescendo, not understanding but dimly suspecting something of what was going on.

"By my pipe, at least set a fellow free and then you can go on billing and cooing!"

They laughingly released the grim warrior and took the bandage from his eyes. Laporte looked at Francesca, at his Captain, around the room.

"Haven't you anything to say, you old bear, to the Contessa who has saved you from prison?"

The speechless Laporte finally extended a hairy paw and inclosed the corresponding delicate little member of Francesca.

She smiled and said, "You are forgiven, though you said such things about me. I heard them all."

Suddenly the clear sweet notes of the French bugle rang out through the balmy spring air.

Egalité started up quickly as the war horse responds to the sound of cannon. "Our signal!" he exclaimed.

"Remember your promise," said Francesca, laying a hand on his arm.

A silent instant he gazed upon her.

"Then one last look at the old flag." They walked to the balcony. A detachment of the Republic's army came marching past the castle. "Ah! the tricolor—red, white and blue." Egalité turned away with emotion.

"Those," said Francesca softly, "are the colors of our new country—red, white and blue."

"Comrade, comrade—by my pipe!"

THE END.

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

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